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Psychological Responses of Children and Adolescents to Divorce:
Findings from the First Stage of a Five-Year Longitudinal Study
in Northern California

Judith S. Wallerstein

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PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSES OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS TO DIVORCE:

FINDINGS FROM THE FIRST STAGE OF A FIVE-YEAR LONGITUDINAL STUDY

IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

by

Judith S. Wallerstein

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Psychological Responses of Children and Adolescents to Divorce: Findings from the First Stage of a Five-Year Longitudinal Study in Northern California

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PREFACE

The research presented here represents the first stage of a four-year longitudinal study, designed to explore and assess the psychological responses of children and adolescents to divorce. The study is primarily hypothesis generating, in that it represents a first attempt to examine directly the course of the responses of children and adolescents in a normal population at the time of the parental separation and in the years immediately following.

The method employed has been primarily that of clinical research, here applied to a non-clinical population of 131 children from 60 divorcing families, within the framework of a community-based planning service for divorcing families with children.

The theoretical viewpoints which converge in this study are those of psychoanalytic psychology, developmental psychology, and crisis intervention theory. Methods of analysis in the initial stage reported in this dissertation have been primarily those of the case study method with some limited use of statistical analysis.

I am profoundly grateful to the members of the Psychology faculty of the University of Lund for their support and recognition of this work, and most particularly to Dr. Bert Westerlundh and Professor Gudmund Smith for their careful reading of the manuscript and their many helpful suggestions which have contributed to the clarity of my own thinking. I wish, also, to express my appreciation to Professor Joseph Sandler of London for his unfailing encouragement and his reading of the final manuscript.

I owe a profound debt of gratitude to my colleagues, particularly to my Co-Principal Investigator Joan B. Kelly, Ph.D., who has shared fully in this journey, in its trials, its challenges, and its rewards,

and to my other colleagues in the project who participated in the formulation of ideas and in the day-to-day work with the 60 families who comprised the subject group. These are Angela Homme, Ph.D., Doris J. Schwarz, M.S.W., Susannah Roy, M.S.W., Janet West, M.S.W.

I wish to express my appreciation to the Zellerbach Family Fund for the generous, unstinting support of this project since its inception. Finally, and most of all, I owe a profound debt of gratitude to the courageous families and children who granted us access to the intimacy of their lives during a very stressful period.

- 1 -

DISSERTATION SUMMARY

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSES OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS TO DIVORCE: FINDINGS FROM THE FIRST STAGE OF A FIVE-YEAR LONGITUDINAL STUDY IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

By Judith S. Wallerstein, M.S.

INTRODUCTION

The findings which are presented in this dissertation regarding the psychological responses of children and adolescents to divorce derive from an investigation which attempted to break new ground in a field in which observations, as well as theoretical formulations and implications for clinical or educational interventions and social policy, were lacking and sorely needed.

Although divorcing parents and their children constitute a rapidly increasing population in the United States, their special attributes have been insufficiently recognized and little studied, and their needs have been poorly served. It has been estimated (Bane, 1976) that between 32% and 46% of all children in the United States who grow up in the 1970's will experience either the separation or divorce of their parents. Nevertheless, of the proliferating divorce-related investigations (Sell, 1977), only a fraction have addressed the impact of divorce on children, and of these, a very small number have examined children in a normal or non-clinical population.

As a consequence, little is known of the child's experience during divorce, to what extent and in what ways these children are at risk, or, if effects which are not immediately visible are likely to appear at a

later developmental stage.

Begun in 1970, the Children of Divorce Project had, as its overarching goals, the systematic exploration of the differential responses of children and adolescents to divorce-related family change, as well as to those changes that occur, consequent to the divorce, within the parent-child relationship. The immediate interest of the Project was in observing and recording appropriately and explaining continuities and changes in the children, in the parent-child relationships, and in the emerging structure of the post-separation family. The broader goals were to begin to generate data which could lead to the establishment of norms for divorce and post-divorce behaviors in children and adolescents and in evolving parent-child relationships which might apply to many different populations; to contribute to the understanding of stress responses in children, in general, and in particular, children's responses to the stresses of parental divorce; and, finally, to lay the basis for the development of reasonable predictors of developmental outcome, as well as for appropriate use of preventive clinical and social ameliorative interventions.

This dissertation brings together findings from the first stage of the investigation, namely, from the assessment of children and adolescents at a time close to the divorce experience. The theoretical perspective, conceptual framework, and methodology of the Project are presented here, as well. Findings from the assessment of the same target population at the 18-month mark, post-separation, and the five-year mark, post-separation, both of which have been completed, are not included here. Theoretical inferences and social policy implications, which are currently receiving attention in important sectors of the professional and legislative-judicial community in the United States, have also been omitted because of space limitations.

¹ The author has been appointed, during the past year, a Commissioner on the Advisory Committee on Family Law of the California State Senate Subcommittee on Administration of Justice. The author is also currently serving on the Commission on Law and Mental Health Problems of the California State Bar.

The Project has already generated 15 papers, most of which have been published in professional journals and textbooks, the remainder await publication or are currently in press. (Appendix 1)

The Children of Divorce Project staff consisted of six people, drawn from several clinical disciplines, all of whom participated in the gathering of the data. This group has been stable and continuous since the investigation's inception. The Project has been supported, since 1971, by the Zellerbach Family Fund of San Francisco and the Marin Community Mental Health Center in California. The Principal Investigator, who is the author of this manuscript, has been in this position since the inception of the Project.

STRUCTURE OF THE PROJECT

The Children of Divorce Project was formally established in 1971 in the Children's Division of the Marin Community Mental Health Center as a research and pilot intervention program, designed to illuminate the needs of children and adolescents caught in the stressful process of family dissolution and to provide psychological interventions and social and educational recommendations to alleviate distress and diminish or prevent psychopathological outcome. This conjoining of preventive and therapeutic emphasis on the emotional pressures upon children at this crisis point and on the problems of parents in sustaining their parental roles during and after the family disruption had not, to our knowledge, been essayed before. The initial target population for the demonstration project was set at sixty families with children, including all of the children who were between the ages of two-and-a-half and eighteen at the time of the parental separation. Funds from a local private foundation

combined with financial help from the county to support the Project. The county undertook to continue the services offered if the program proved successful and appropriate to the needs of the community.

Several decisions made at the outset reflected the priorities of the public agency, as well as the psychological orientation and clinical and research interests of the principals.

Because the program was conceptualized as primarily preventive in its goals, it was decided to address the needs of children and adolescents in a general or non-patient divorcing population; namely, children whose intellectual and emotional development was considered within normal limits and who had been able to maintain age-appropriate levels in school prior to the divorce. Excluded from the service at this beginning phase were children with long-standing or chronic psychological difficulties or intellectual impairments. Youngsters in these groups who were in need of treatment were eligible for the regular services offered by the Community Mental Health Center which continued to be available to the community.

Of the million children a year newly affected by divorce throughout the country, the largest group by far would most likely fall within this "normal" category which had been selected. Little was known about the effects of stress upon a normal population of children. Less was known about the possibility of developing a preventive service which could reduce the need for later formal psychotherapeutic intervention. Further, the selection of a normal population as the target group appeared to be most representative of the children of divorce throughout the country and throughout the immediate community. By the same token, programs developed in relation to this group were likely to have more widespread applicability. Approximately 5% of the children who were referred within this broad category were nonetheless diagnosed by us as suffering from severe ego impairments, and an additional 12% as suffering from moderate impairments and/or consolidated neurotic symptoms of significant proportions, although no one had sought treatment on their behalf.

The perspectives which shaped the Children of Divorce Project were three-fold: (1) The legislated mandate of the Community Mental Health Center to exercise community leadership in identifying unmet mental health needs and in developing early intervention and preventive programs for the community. (2) The psychoanalytic theory of child development, particularly the child at the different chronological ages and developmental stages which govern the child's perception of and capacities to respond to stress; the complex psychology of the unfolding parent-child relationship with each parent and with both parents together at successive life stages of child and parent; and the ramifying significance for personality development of parental loss at different developmental stages. (3) Crisis intervention theory, as developed in psychoanalysis in relation to object loss and mourning, here extended to a new population, namely children and adolescents who must accept and master the departure of one parent as a major and present figure in their young lives.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Psychoanalytic theory has long affirmed the unique psychological matrix of the stable family for the emotional, intellectual, and moral maturation of the child. The intricate patterning of the intimate, passionate, inevitably conflictful triangular attachments of family life has been considered to provide the optimum milieu for the mastery of complex developmental tasks that begin in infancy and continue through young adulthood. When successfully negotiated, these tasks, which unfold with each successive developmental stage, eventuate in the hard-won achievements and identifications of adulthood, including particularly the capacity and willingness to be, in turn, a "good enough" parent to the next generation. While historically infancy and pre-oedipal development have been conceptualized primarily in terms of the mother-child dyad, the central contribution of the father in the laying down of

sexual and gender identifications in these earliest years has been recently examined (Abelin, 1975), as has the critical significance of the father's relationship with his pre-oedipal son in fostering early identifications with the paternal role (Gurwitt, 1976; Ross, 1977).

Where these essential relationship continuities are broken or interrupted by parental illness, death, abandonment, or other disruption of the child's relationship with either or both parents, there is hazard to this normal development. Moreover, it appears that the affected child suffers not only at the time of the acute loss, but may tragically continue to suffer as the loss is re-experienced anew at each developmental stage, where the needed parent fails again to appear to play his or her vital role in the unfolding developmental drama, as determined by the interaction of biology and psychology and as shaped by the society in which the child grows.

Evidence from clinical sources, including the psychoanalysis of adults and children, has supported this grave view of the effects of parental loss in childhood and the serious threat which death and separation pose to normal developmental processes during childhood and adolescence (Fleming, J. and Altschul, S., 1963; Pollock, 1961, 1962). In an extensive review of the literature regarding children's reactions to death and to transitory losses (italics ours), Nagera (1970) observed, "The child is in the middle of a multiplicity of processes of development in all sorts of areas and directions, processes which require for their normal unfolding the presence of the suddenly absent object." In summary in the same review he stated: "It seems reasonable to conclude that the death of important objects will, of necessity, produce a serious disruption of the developmental processes per se, quite apart from the special significance that the event may have for the child according to age, quality of the relationship, intensity of the trauma, special circumstances surrounding the death, the reaction to the event by the remaining important family members, possible changes for the worse in the child's life circumstances."

Even brief separations when the very young child or the parent has required relatively short-term hospitalization can precipitate serious depressive reactions and severe regressions in previously healthy, well-developed children. The rapidity with which major behavioral and affective changes occur in response to separation from one or both parents is remarkable, and the poignant, intense suffering of the separated child, which has been captured on film, is an unforgettable experience for the adult observer (Robertson, J. and Robertson, J., 1971). Unintervened in, many of these changes may be long-lasting.

In the oedipal child, the consequences of parental loss have been considered to pose a special threat to intrapsychic development and sexual identifications. Emphasizing the time of the loss, which he referred to as "environmental deficiency coordinated to a specific developmental phase," Neubauer (1960) offered the hypothesis that the lack of stimulation normally found in the routine day-to-day interplay between the oedipal child and each parent, and especially as evidenced by the relationship of the parents to each other, imposed a basic imbalance: "Synchronization and dosing of oedipal experiences in a continuous reality context within which phase specific events can be absorbed is not present....in the absence of the parental interplay.... developmental forces crystallize too suddenly around events, rather than being slowly but continuously interwoven and experienced and hence have an extraordinary effect....It is possible that under these circumstances even the most optimal mother-child relationship is burdened by a desperate all-or-none quality, so that the fear of the loss of the only object masks and dominates the reality of the relationship." Neubauer further postulates that pseudo latency accompanied by impaired reality testing may replace a real resolution of oedipal conflicts in the child who is separated from one parent, in that the child is hard pressed to negotiate and resolve erotic and aggressive oedipal fantasies without the real and continuing participation of the absent father.

The further disruptive developmental impact of parental loss during the critical phase of adolescence has been spelled out most especially by Laufer (1966). He called particular attention to the difficulties in achieving the central adolescent tasks of psychological separation from the real parents, as well as the archaic internalized parental introjects, at a time when the parent, in reality, is dying or totally absent.

Thus, psychoanalytic theory in its own evolution has left behind its earliest focus on the specific traumatic event as the direct determinant of neurosis, in this instance the trauma of the loss itself, and has rather moved increasingly to the developmental concern with the evolving relationship configurations and the long-lasting developmental sequelae and characterological consequences of the loss and absence of parental figures extended over time through the succession of critical developmental stages.

These formulations, here summarized, regarding the psychic hazards to development posed by parental absence during childhood and adolescence and the implications for the central importance of sustained continuity in relationship with both parents led us to view the dramatic rise in divorce in recent years throughout the country with considerable apprehension. Although it was by no means clear that the sequelae of divorce would be entirely comparable or analogous to the sequelae of death or separation, nevertheless the results, whether conceptualized in terms of the greater instability of the basic American family or of a fundamental change in the American nuclear family structure, were worrisome. The lives of millions of children were being disrupted and radically changed by the growing increase of divorce.

SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE

Systematic observation or investigation of the divorce experience in children and adolescents and into the vicissitudes of the parent-child relationships during and after the divorce were also severely limited at that

time. Clinical reports regarding children of divorce rested in the main on observations of psychologically troubled children who had been brought to treatment several years after the parental disruption or children originally brought as patients who were in continuing treatment throughout the divorce experience (Despert, 1953; Steinzor, 1969). Sociological surveys emphasizing data collected largely by questionnaire reported that children in divorced families seemed relatively intact on a variety of social and psychological measures and more intact than children who remained within unhappy marriages (Burchinal, 1964; Goode, 1956; Landis, 1960; Nye, 1957). Only one published study focussed intensively on the experiences of individual children in a non-patient population at the time of divorce (McDermott, 1968). This study reported significant behavioral and mood changes in over half of the observed nursery school age children which reflected their anxiety and suffering. A few of the youngsters were considered by the investigator to be at high risk in terms of their future psychological development. He noted, in particular, several little girls who showed newly brittle and precocious pseudo-mature behavior and several already troubled children whose psychological condition deteriorated markedly under the impact of the divorce-induced stress.

SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

A truly extraordinary rise in the incidence of divorce became evident nationwide in the United States in the late sixties and early seventies. By 1970, the year before the investigation began, 15% of all children throughout the country under the age of 18 had parents who were divorced (Carter and Glick, 1976). With this trend continuing unabated in the years that followed, by 1976, the divorce rate had risen 113% over that of a decade earlier (Ibid.). Whereas in 1966 one divorce was granted for every four marriages performed, by 1976, the ratio had changed to one

2 In 1978, the National Institute of Mental Health called its first research conference regarding the needs of children of divorce.

divorce for every two marriages performed. In 1973 and 1974 and again in 1975, over a million new children below the age of 18 experienced the divorce of their parents and the consequent disruption of their families (Carter and Glick, 1976).

The state of California has appeared, for many years, at the top of this divorce rise. Divorce filings in California increased 96% between the years 1962 and 1972, as compared with an increase of 81% throughout the United States during the same time span (California Dept. of Public Health, 1972). California was also the state which pioneered new divorce legislation, radically easing the grounds for divorce. In January 1970, the new law introduced the concept of no-fault marital dissolution and also shortened the waiting period for the final decree from twelve to six months.

This overall decreased stability of the American family was nowhere more visible than in Marin, a suburban county in the San Francisco Bay Area of Northern California. In 1970, one year prior to the establishment of the intervention program described in this paper, the number of people in Marin County who applied for divorce exceeded those who applied for a marriage license, and the divorce rate in the county was far higher than that which obtained throughout the state (which itself was among the highest in the country). Regarded as a coveted place in which to live, the county comprises six hundred square miles of splendid northern California countryside, and contained in that year a relatively affluent, educated, and homogeneous population of 206,000. Of the families with children within the county, 11.6% were headed by a single parent, largely as a result of divorce (Ibid.)

CRISIS THEORY

Mindful that crisis theory had developed initially in relation to death and mourning and mostly with an adult population, we decided that its conceptualizations, nonetheless, represented a useful beginning framework for the initial intervention program. We reasoned that the time period immediately following the parental separation would be critical in terms of accessibility of the involved individuals to change. Our subsequent experience has indeed confirmed that relationships at this time are shaking loose from their moorings and that considerable anxiety is being generated in this process. In accord with the dictates of crisis theory, the chances for effecting change in this fluid system appear to be enhanced.

Even more particular to the divorcing process, the stress-laden decisions which are generally made at the time of the marital dissolution or during the immediate post-separation period in regard to the subsequent structuring of child-parent relationship, and which include custody, visitations, and other major dimensions, have long-term consequences for the future of the child and the future of the parent-child relationship. Practical wisdom would dictate the usefulness of providing parents with the opportunity in this immediate post-separation period for thoughtful consideration of consequences and alternatives, as well as an opportunity to express a wide range of intense feelings.

These and other particulars of the divorcing process, combined with the central tenets of crisis intervention theory, translated into five specific assumptions that shaped the time, the duration, and the strategy of the Project: (a) that divorce constitutes a time-limited crisis in the life of the child and the adult during which the usual coping and adaptive mechanisms are in disarray; (b) that the adult's capacity to parent is diminished at such a time; (c) that the child and adolescent might benefit from the opportunity to talk with an objective and psychologically informed adult who might help to clarify feelings, sort out fantasy from reality, and enable the young person to place

his responses and his situation within the appropriate perspective; (d) that the same would be true for our counseling with the parents; and (e) that counseling within a time-limited psychotherapy model represented the treatment of choice.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SERVICE

The program, as it finally evolved, was located at one of the offices of the Community Mental Health Center, provided a separate gateway, and offered only divorce-related counseling. The Project staff was drawn from the clinical staff of the Community Mental Health Center and consisted of an inter-disciplinary team of six persons trained in clinical work with children and families.

Parents in the process of divorce were referred by attorneys, school psychologists, teachers, social agencies, and the community at large. A preparatory period of carefully planned community education and personal contact with these sources provided the foundation for their referrals. A limited number of cases were referred by the court when the investigative worker was hopeful that litigation over custody or visitation could be avoided through counseling. The service was advertised as preventive and applicable to all families with children undergoing a divorce, and not addressed to families in special distress or unusual circumstances. Parents came with the understanding that our work was child-centered, preventive, and planning oriented. The intervention model was time-limited from the outset. Parents came for an initial period of six weeks of counseling for themselves and their families. Each parent and each child was seen separately by the same clinician three to six times. An average of 14.2 hours was spent with each family in the Project. In addition, one staff member was employed in visiting the schools to obtain independent information directly from teachers.

In accord with our commitment to a developmental perspective, and the fact that psychological changes relevant to changes in the family structure and the parent-child relationship were more likely to become visible over time,

the Project was designed to yield longitudinal observations, as well as to provide for appropriate clinical follow-up. Therefore, families were invited to return for continued consultation within a year of the initial six-week intervention. They were informed that the psychotherapist would be available during the intervening year, should they wish to consult the service. In this way, the second intervention was planned at one year from the initial one. The third intervention was planned at the four-to-five-year mark post-separation.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TARGET POPULATION

The sample population consisted of 60 families with 136 children (age 1 to 22) of whom 131 (age 2 to 18) participated fully enough to obtain sufficient data. As noted earlier, our interest in studying the responses of normal children and adolescents to the divorcing process led us to exclude children with a history of psychological difficulty and/or psychotherapy, or where the child's general psychological, social, or intellectual development fell significantly below appropriate developmental norms.

Parent and Family Characteristics. Eighty-eight percent of the couples were white, 3% black, and 8% were interracial marriages. The fathers, in particular, were well educated (see table 1). The families were predominantly middle and upper-middle class (see table 2), as determined by the Hollingshead Two-Factor Index (Hollingshead, 1957). Our sample was broadly representative of the county population in socioeconomic distribution.

Table 1

Education Level of Parents at Initial Contact

	Fathers	Mothers
Less than H.S.	5%	2%
H.S. Diploma	13%	22%
Some college	23%	42%
College degree	22%	25%
Some graduate work	10%	5%
Graduate degree	27%	3%

Table 2

Social Class Distribution at Initial Contact and First Follow-Up

Social Class	At Separation (N=60)	Fathers at Follow-Up (N=58)	Mothers at Follow-Up (N=58)
V (low)	10%	14%	7%
IV	18%	20%	26%
III	28%	23%	35%
II	20%	18%	23%
I (high)	23%	24%	9%

The mean age of the men in the study was 36.9 at the time of separation; the mean age of the women was 34.1. Married an average of 11.1 years prior to the final separation, the couples averaged 2.2 children per family. Those who married following the discovery of pregnancy were married fewer years (mean = 8.2) before their separation, but they did not differ in family size.

In 75% of the families, the women made the final decision to terminate the marriage. The men initially opposed the divorce strongly in 42% of the families. The preponderance of women seeking divorce appeared unrelated to socioeconomic status or to the age of the children. In 59 of the 60 families, mothers were awarded physical and legal custody of the children.

Six fathers (10%) and four mothers (7%) had been married previously. Four parents had children from these earlier marriages, but none resided in the current homes. Nearly 10% of the fathers and 16% of the mothers had experienced divorce when they were children or adolescents. Several mothers reported their parents' divorce during their childhood as a significant factor in their postponement of their own decision to terminate the marriage. They indicated that they still recalled their own divorce-induced suffering when they were children.

Two-thirds of the men had been continuously employed, one-quarter

intermittently unemployed, and nearly 10% chronically unemployed during the marriage. For some men, partial or full unemployment was represented as a choice of life style. "I'd rather collect welfare than pump gas." For others, their lack of skill and/or psychological difficulties made continued employment difficult to maintain.

In the two years prior to the separation, 33% of the women worked full-time and 30% part-time. With housing costs and rising property taxes, many women worked out of economic necessity. Others were preparing for economic independence consequent to divorce by entering the job market. A small number entered educational or training programs to learn skills or upgrade their occupational functioning. A solid core of women (42%) who had never worked before or during the marriage were, due to their age and lack of employment experience, realistically unemployable at a time of high national and local unemployment. Further, of this group, we estimated that nearly half were unable to work following separation due to acute and disorganizing emotional disturbance. For some of these women, three to five years were required post-separation before they could productively enter the work force.

The financial difficulties consequent to divorce have been detailed elsewhere. Despite the middle/upper-middle class skew in our population, economic hardship and problems were a focus and preoccupation in all but a very few families. Two-thirds of the men and one-half of the women experienced a relatively stable but significantly reduced standard of living. Forty-five percent of the women and a third of the men found their financial situation after separation to be either extremely marginal or totally unpredictable from month to month. This fact propelled more women into full-time work (37%) following the separation, while others found piece-meal part-time jobs (24%). Clearly, the first 12-month period following separation was the most chaotic and depriving in economic terms. At 18 months post-separation, there was greater financial stability and more full-time work for both men and women, although one-quarter of the fathers and

one-third of the mothers were still living in a marginal or failing economic situation, including 8% on welfare.

The Children. Of the 131 children included in the study, 48% were male, 52% female. Fifty-three percent of the children were between the ages of 2 and 8 years at the time they were first seen (see table 3).

Table 3
Children's Ages at Counseling

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Boys</u>	<u>Girls</u>
Pre-school (2-4 years)	20	15	10	10
Oedipal (5 & 6 years)	22	17	13	9
Early Latency (7 & 8 years)	27	21	15	12
Late Latency (9 & 10 years)	32	24	12	20
Pre-adolescence (11 & 12 years)	12	9	6	6
Adolescence (13-18 years)	18	14	7	11
	<u>131</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>63</u>	<u>68</u>

The search for a normal population of children experiencing divorce produced a group of children with a broad range of adequacy in their overall psychological functioning. None of the children and adolescents in our sample had been identified as being especially at risk or in need of psychological services by their parents and school personnel. It may be that the diversity or spread in functioning would be found in all "normal" populations of children. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that all of these children had been living in families where the parents were in conflict sufficient enough to eventuate in divorce, and little is known about the psychological effects of this experience on children's overall development.

A seven-point scale was developed to rate the overall adequacy of the general psychological functioning of each child or adolescent, ranging from "severely impaired but not psychotic" at one end to "excellent functioning" at the other. Ratings on this scale represented a composite picture of each child or adolescent in terms of his developmental, cognitive, social, and psychological progress thus far, in comparison to generally accepted norms. Essentially, a shorthand

psycho-developmental diagnosis, this global "ego-functioning" variable was found in subsequent data analyses to be highly and significantly correlated with other variables which assessed more discrete but component aspects of a child's psychological functioning. These variables included self-esteem, creativity, sublimation, anger, feelings of deprivation, anxiety, depression, quality of object relationships, conscience development, peer relations, social maturity, and school functioning.

Table 4 presents the outcome of these ratings of ego-function at the initial counseling. The distribution of children along a normal curve suggests no significant skewing in the direction of pathological development.

Table 4

Assessment of Ego-Intactness/General Functioning

<u>Scale Rating</u>	<u>% of Children</u>	<u>Boys</u>	<u>Girls</u>
1. Severely impaired, not psychotic	5%	N= 4	N= 2
2. Moderate impairment	12%	N= 9	N= 7
3. Unevenness, fluctuation in functioning	22%	N=17	N=12
4. Adequate functioning, relatively intact	26%	N=13	N=21
5. Good functioning, generally intact	24%	N=17	N=14
6. Very good, quite intact	10%	N= 3	N=10
7. Excellent, unusually good functioning	2%	----	N= 2
		N=63	N=68

Analyses of variance also indicated no significant differences in overall psychological functioning between the means of the primary age and sex groups used in correlation and factor analyses. These major groups were: boys 2 to 8, boys 9 to 18, girls 2 to 8, and girls 9 to 18. Nor were there any significant differences in adequacy of psychological functioning when age was the independent variable (2 to 6 vs. 7 to 12 vs. 13 to 18). When sex alone was considered, the difference between means approached significance ($\leq .05$), with girls in our sample functioning at a generally more intact level, psychologically, than boys. All of the children and adolescents were considered by us and the school to be within a normal range of intellectual capacity.

METHODOLOGY

The sixty families included in the final research sample were seen an average of five months post-separation. Average number of interviews per family was 14.2 (mean number with father 3.4; with mother 5.3; with children 3.3). Parent interviews lasted one to two hours; child interviews averaged one hour. Interviewers followed semi-structured guides in obtaining information from parents and children. (Appendix 3 and 4.)

DIVORCE SPECIFIC ASSESSMENT OF ADULTS

Early intervention requires its own lexicon in diagnosis and in treatment description. Our customary clinical nosology which serves in the usual clinic population to distinguish those in need of treatment and to provide the basis for their treatment planning is far less useful when applied to a general population in which the goal is primary or secondary prevention, and the clinical process is directed towards life planning. Clinically, it is sometimes very difficult to differentiate persons responding to high stress from those with long-standing psychological illness or from persons in the process of becoming seriously ill immediately prior to or during the marital dissolution, especially where the fact of the divorce itself may be both contributory to and a reflection of the evolving psychological disequilibrium.

Many of the adults, as well as the children and adolescents, were suffering with disabling symptoms of various kinds when seen at the time of initial counseling. These included withdrawal, regression, minor delinquencies, suspiciousness, temporary impairment of reality testing, and agitated depressions accompanied by violent behaviors, related in onset for the most part to the trigger of the divorce stress. As the study proceeded, it became increasingly clear to us that the family dissolution not infrequently provoked entirely new behaviors, particularly uncontrolled aggressive outbursts, in persons who had been relatively circumspect or even constricted in their lives to

that point. The diagnostic dilemma posed by these observations consists of the not uncommon disjunctive spread between the intensity of the maladaptive or distressed behavioral response and the degree of underlying psychologic stability and/or neurotic conflict. Put simply, very "sick" looking behavior as a response to or surrounding the divorce stress could be entirely disproportionate to the psychopathology present; in fact, could evolve within reasonably intact personality structures.

As a first step, it was necessary to construct an abbreviated diagnostic process specific to the impact of the divorce on the individual parent which would yield several kinds of information: (a) observations regarding the parent's central affective response to the divorce experience, the major defenses and coping mechanisms mobilized, either separately or in alignment with one or more children; (b) information regarding the individual's underlying character structure and customary functioning, sufficient to permit some estimate of his or her capacity to reorganize and manage as a single person within the foreseeable future; (c) observations regarding the individual in his past and present parenting role.

These considerations led to the particular sequencing and content structure of the history taking which gradually evolved within the goals of this divorce-specific assessment. The semi-structured beginning interview was found to be most helpful to the parents, partly because of the organization of the history taking which was psychologically supportive of the distressed parent, and partly because they came without identified complaints which could serve as an organized focus for the history. We also found that a history which began with the courtship and led sequentially through the vicissitudes of the marriage and its failure was congenial to the mood and preoccupation of many parents and enabled them to become rapidly engaged in the counseling relationship.

Accordingly, we began with the courtship, the events of the marriage, the balance of gratifications and stresses within the marriage, and finally

the escalating events and feelings that led to the marital failure. We found that we needed an understanding of the marriage and the family relationships in order to understand the marital dissolution and to gauge the effect upon the children and adults. We were interested, for example, to find that many divorcing families had been close and had shared social and recreational activities over many years. It was reasonable to assume that the loss of a close and supportive family would constitute a different experience for children than the loss of a family where each member customarily went his own way. We were interested in ascertaining the dominant style of family life and interaction, which parent had initiated the divorce, which had opposed it, and to what extent the decision had been gradual or represented a sharp discontinuity with the past. Details regarding the ambience and the events of the marital dissolution, and most particularly the eruptions of anger and possible physical violence between the parents, proved to be very important in understanding the responses of the children and adults alike.

We then proceeded to map out the current social and economic situation of each parent, including educational and employment histories, current life plans, expected continuities and changes. We were interested in the presence or absence of support from parents and friends, of other love or sexual relationships, since in many instances these affected the children profoundly. We were also interested in the previous history of psychotherapy and of efforts to reconcile the marriage.

The third part of the history taking process with each parent dealt directly with the parent-child relationship and the parent's perception of each of the children, separately, and included the history of the relationship of both parents with the particular child at different stages of the child's development, as well as the divorce-engendered stresses, supports, and tensions in the present relationship. Within the immediate present, our concern was with the details of child interaction and child management with each of the parents. Only by familiarity with the details of the parent's contact with the child during the child's regular routines could we estimate the specific

changes which the child would experience with the family's disruption. Parents were also asked about the child's understanding of the marital dispute and divorce, how much the child had participated in the divorce decision and in the decision-making in general of the family, how much the child had observed fights and angers, what explanations had been offered to the child, by whom, and what the child's responses had been - in words, in behavior, and in mood. Finally, we inquired about expectations and plans for the immediate future in regard to relationships with their children. We asked about visiting patterns and expectations, frustrations and gratifications with each child, and we explored the specific stresses of being a single custodial parent, and the problems and the gratifications inherent in the new role.

These data, obtained in two-to-three hours with each parent seen separately, enabled us to develop three interlocking sets of formulations:

- (a) a tentative diagnostic formulation regarding the central psychological impact of the divorce experience, including an overall estimate of the capacity and current functioning of the adult in the face of the particular effects of the divorce, the sense of loss, of diminished self-esteem, of anger, grief, and humiliation, as well as relief and the possibility of new pleasure;
- (b) a tentative diagnostic formulation of the usual and customary functioning, the basic character structure and its available inner and outer resources;
- and (c) a tentative diagnostic formulation regarding the motivation and the available capacities of the adult to newly assume or to continue the role of parent under the new strictures and potentialities of the post-divorce family structure and his or her new role within that structure. This overall assessment of each parent, combined with the comparable assessment of the child or children in the family, enabled the establishment of agendas and priorities in the counseling process.

DIVORCE SPECIFIC ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN

Within the constraints of a short-term intervention, a detailed developmental profile of the child was not feasible. It was possible very quickly to establish whether the child had achieved age-appropriate milestones against which the effects of current stresses could be measured. With the child as with the parent, our major interest was a focussed assessment of each child's response to the divorce stress.

The divorce-specific assessment which evolved in the course of the Project included: (1) an abbreviated assessment of the overall developmental achievement of each child; (2) an assessment of each child's unique response to and experience with his parents' separation and divorce; (3) an evaluation of the network of support systems now surrounding and available to each child.

The child's response to the divorce situation in its broadest sense included each child's thoughts, fantasies, affects, and behavioral responses to the divorce, the extent to which pain and anxiety were consciously experienced, various defensive and adaptive resources deployed to deal with the stress, and whether these responses were heavily influenced by conscious or unconscious parental pressures and activities.

First, we were interested in exploring each child's understanding of his parents' divorce - what he had been told, how he understood the parents' various explanations, what his private ideas were about the divorce. Obtaining this information seemed to be, technically, a good starting point in the first session, after discussion of the child's participation in the counseling. With many young children, and particularly with those of pre-school age, the understanding of the meaning of the divorce, as well as the reasons for the divorce, was so incomplete or confused that, cognitively and affectively, these youngsters seemed paralyzed in their attempts to cope with the immense and often frightening changes in their lives. Many pre-school children had been given no explanation of the divorce. We found that pre-school children

often assumed some degree of fantasy responsibility for causing their parents' divorce. Therefore, we particularly inquired into their explanations and fantasies about the events of the divorce.

Second, the affective responses to the parents' separation and divorce became a predominant focus of the assessment for each child. How much pain was the child experiencing; what were the various conscious and unconscious manifestations of this pain? Was the suffering on the increase, or diminishing in intensity? To what extent was the child being torn apart by loyalty conflicts? We became aware of a widespread rise in irritability and aggressive behavior, and made particular note of their expression and duration. Another aspect considered was the presence of overt or underlying depressive reactions, and the extent to which these were burdening the sum of the developmental processes. The predominant patterning of certain affects, and the intensity of their expression, has been found to be highly related to the child's age.

Third, the assessment considered whether the child's usual array of defenses continued to serve him under the current stressful situation, or whether other defensive and coping strategies emerged in response to the pain of the divorce. With early latency children, for example, the age-appropriate defenses of denial by fantasy and reversal often did not hold under the divorce stress, resulting in regression and acute, open, and immobilizing suffering. In contrast, the older children and adolescents tended more often to show intense anger, which, while it may have defended against great sadness or depression, served, however, to galvanize them into activities that appeared to ease the divorce distress.

The complexity of these coping behaviors was at times striking, and highlighted for us some of the special attributes of the divorce assessment previously noted. Intense alignment between some of the older children and one of their parents, combined with hostile, open exclusion of the other parent, seemed to be a coping strategy specific to some children of divorce. The survival aspect of these and similar behaviors for the child in certain house-

holds was previously unappreciated by us, and not necessarily an indication of psychopathology.

A fourth variable considered in the divorce-specific assessment, which was based on information from several sources, was the pervasiveness or spread of the child's responses to the divorce. Were the responses primarily private, contained and held within, or did they emerge, as well, in other settings? Among nearly half of the latency children, for example, striking changes in behavior and affect were noted in the school setting, but these same children were not necessarily indicating distress at home. One nine-year-old boy, eight months after the separation, sat stolidly in his classroom, learning little, and refusing to remove his heavy jacket. Just as abruptly, this behavior ceased after three months. During this entire period, the child's behavior at home was unchanged.

Fifth, our assessment included an inquiry into new behaviors, specifically the appearance of new symptoms. For instance, we found among the older children an increase in somatic symptoms in response to the separation, and the onset, in some, of delinquent behaviors, particularly stealing and precocious sexual activity. In the seven- and eight-year-olds, at one year follow-up, we found newly consolidated learning difficulties in children who previously had done well. Phobias, separation anxieties, and other regressive symptoms, including loss of toilet training, appeared in many pre-school children for the first time after the parental separation. Many such symptoms frightened and burdened their parents and created increased suffering for the children, as well.

Support systems take on particular significance at times of crisis for children, especially when the crisis involves the disruption of the family structure. Because the period of disorganization subsequent to divorce is likely to be an extended one, the child's sense of continuity and stability is more dependent upon the availability of extrafamilial supports, as well as what protection and concern can be mobilized in the parent-child relationships during this time.

Of great importance in the assessment of this concentric web of potential supports available to each child is a close scrutiny of the current parent-child relationship, as seen through the eyes of the child. The child's relationship with the custodial parent and the visiting parent must be examined separately at the time of divorce. During the divorcing period, parent-child relationships are fluid and subject to radical changes in character. Therefore, from the vantage point of the child, it is important to evaluate the extent to which the relationship with the parent is providing support and promoting development and to make a dynamic assessment regarding its potential for change in the direction of growth. Often, what appears to be a close and gratifying relationship between parent and child at this time may, in fact, be destructive or growth-inhibiting. It may, in some such cases, be important to encourage greater distance between parent and child. Sometimes the role of the child in providing support to a distressed parent becomes greatly magnified, in which case the judgment must be made as to whether the psychological cost to the child is too high or, in fact, the role is promoting greater maturity and increased empathy in a competent child.

Relationships between siblings require particular scrutiny at the time of divorce. Siblings have the potential for supporting each other in strikingly empathic ways, resulting in an easing of the divorce-induced stress. Only children, as a group, seemed to be more vulnerable to the stresses and conflicts of divorce. In particular, children without siblings, who lived with embittered custodial parents bent on destroying the image of their divorced spouses, fared poorly as a group over the first year, seemingly because they received the brunt of the undiluted hostility without the protective cushion or shield of other siblings. On the whole, sibling support appeared to be more comforting than destructive. Yet, siblings can, as well, interact with each other so as to increase a child's feelings of alienation, injustice, or anger. In one family, for example, the six-year-old sister's intense anger at her father for severely curtailing his visiting was almost entirely displaced

upon her younger brother. Thus, the sequelae of the divorce for this boy included not only the loss of the father, but an unbearable amount of unprovoked hostility, expressed openly in various forms, including verbal abuse, the willful destruction of the boy's favorite toys, and excessive hitting by his older sister.

Similarly, grandparents and other extended family may provide considerable support, or may exacerbate the children's conflicts, even when living at a considerable distance. Some paternal grandparents were quite interested and active in maintaining close ties to their grandchildren, even though the children remained in the custody of their former daughter-in-law, and often despite intense hostility between their son and daughter-in-law. Such loving interest was undoubtedly helpful for most children, faced as they were with fears and concerns about abandonment by the non-custodial parent and a general sense of deprivation. Yet, other grandparents created intense pressures by insisting their grandchildren reject the non-related parent, and here the "support" had a disorganizing, often destructive effect. We saw this especially where ethnic and racial biases that had been a part of the extended family's original opposition to the marriage, resurfaced, following the separation. Clearly, those children not cut adrift by extended family felt less isolated, and many reaped the benefits of grandparents' love extended in the form of financial support, vacation trips, baby-sitting, or family reunions.

Many youngsters found some support within the school setting because their attitudes and performance in school provided accustomed gratifications which they were able to sustain in the face of the divorce stress. Further, the attention, sympathy, and tolerance demonstrated by numerous teachers, who had been informed about the divorce, was sustaining to a number of children feeling emotionally undernourished at home. This depended very much upon the child's capacity to make use of substitute adult figures. Teachers became a central stable figure in the lives of several children in the months

following the separation, in some cases the only stable figure in these children's environment.

The ability to rely upon peer support, despite being related to age factors, varied immensely from child to child. Some of the older children found themselves unable to tell their best friends that their parents were divorcing, while others found it helpful to share every detail of their circumstances. One cannot simply assume that having good friends eases the impact. Extracurricular and creative activities assumed particular importance for children during the divorce stress and enabled many older children to derive comfort and enhance their sense of mastery.

Sometimes, our divorce-specific assessment failed to turn up adequate supports, without or outside the family, to maintain the development of the child. Such children were among the group of "forlorn children" observed by us, for whom the nurturance and stability provided in the pre-divorce parent-child relationships had dissipated after the separation, resulting in sad bewilderment, gradually decreasing trust in adults, and feelings of deprivation in the children. Under such circumstances, psychotherapy takes on increased importance as a major support available to the child. The frequent unavailability of support systems within extended family or community for these children or their parents gave a particular significance to our efforts to mobilize the strengths in the father-child relationship. It also led to the development of programs geared at educating school teachers and school counselors to help them deal in a more differentiated and supportive way with many unmet needs of these children, for whom the school was often the most stable and continuing institution.

CLINICAL ANALYSIS

The papers which we include here, which report the initial responses of children and adolescents, were based largely on clinical analysis of the

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interview protocols. Those papers which report the subsequent follow-ups of the sample are based largely on the results of statistical analysis, including reliance on frequency distribution, correlation matrices, and factor analysis for organizing the data into manageable proportions.

For purposes of clinical study and analysis, the interviews with each family member were recorded in detail by the clinician shortly after the interview. These interview sequences, which constituted a running, detailed narrative, included three-to-six hours of interviews with each adult and each child who was between the ages of two-and-a-half and eighteen when first seen. The average length of an interview hour was two single-spaced type-written pages. Interviews with the teacher and other school personnel, which had been conducted independently by a separate team member, were similarly recorded. All these, together with drawings elicited from the children as part of their interview, were entered into a folder for each family.

The Principal Investigator and the Co-Principal Investigator read the protocols in each of the sixty folders and summarized the interview material in accord with the divorce-specific assessments. These summaries, together with the protocols, constituted the basic data of the clinical research. (See Appendix 5 for outline used.)

The initial ten cases of the Project were analyzed jointly by the Principal Investigator and the Co-Principal Investigator. Following this, the cases were divided between the two investigators. The enormity of the task precluded the possibility of both investigators completing forms on each family and thereby obtaining inter-rater reliability. Spot checks, however, done at regular intervals, suggested remarkably high inter-rater reliability.

The psychological profiles of the children and their parents were sorted into small groups, according to age of the children. They were inspected minutely, and the various dimensions which emerged were entered on large charts by hand. Thus, the chart on the pre-school children showed, at a glance, for the 34 children, the psychological profile of

each parent; the parent-child relationships, pre-divorce; the parent-child relationships at the time of the divorce; the central psychological response of each parent to the other and to the child; the customary functioning of each child; changes in the child's behavior; a full report of fantasy and play material in relationship with the interviewer; school behavior and learning, as reported by the school; and relationships with peers, as reported by parents and by teachers. These charts, which enabled comparisons and difference to emerge along the different dimensions, together with the original protocols, provided the clinical data base for the Project and for the initial papers.

Statistical Method. Four ratings scales were developed to reduce the clinical notes to a form which was statistically analyzeable. Parent Data Form One was composed of 290 items; Parent Form Two of 189 items. The Parent Data Forms contained coded demographic and factual data relating to the marriage and separation and included extensive clinical ratings of each parent's psychological and social experiences in the marriage and after separation. Similarly, the two Child Data Forms, with 231 variables on the first and 182 variables on the second, included basic demographic data for each child, various changes in his environment, the ratings of each child's response to and experience with the parents' divorce, as well as each child's intellectual, academic, social, cognitive, and psychological status. The quality of the parent-child relationships and changes in parenting consequent to divorce were also rated, as were visiting patterns and issues. Each child's ratings (usually on seven-point scales) represented a composite formulation of all information gathered from each parent and the child, reports from the school obtained independently by a staff member hired for that purpose, and from the clinician's own observations of the child during the three-to-four sessions. This process of encoding data was repeated for the follow-up interviews, as well, using slightly modified, shortened Follow-Up Data Forms. The Co-Principal investigators completed all of these data forms

for each family, scoring or rating approximately 1400 variables for an average family with two children. As noted, the enormity and tediousness of the task precluded the possibility of both investigators completing the forms for each family, and therein obtaining inter-rater reliability measures. While the scales were developed jointly, using a shared conceptual framework, and the first several families were rated together as a training exercise, the magnitude of the reliability problem is unknown. Spot checks, done informally over the past five years, suggest remarkably high inter-reliability.

After coded data for each child, adolescent, and parent was placed on IBM cards, extensive statistical analyses were conducted to provide the data reported in these papers. Primarily, we have relied upon frequency distributions, correlation matrices, and factor analyses for organizing the data into manageable proportions. The four basic age-sex groupings of children described earlier were used for factor analytic and correlational analyses, primarily to ensure an adequate sample size. These particular groups were dictated by careful analyses of the original frequency tables and means for each variable, in which the sample had been divided into six age groups (2-4; 5-6; 7-8; 9-10; 11-12; 13-18) and run for each sex. Thus we report some frequency distributions of the narrower age groups, but correlation and factor analytic data for the larger groups of younger and older boys and girls.

LIMITATIONS AND SOME METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Because these hypotheses and these beginning norms have been derived from a California suburban, predominantly white, middle-class population, it would appear important to study divorcing families at similar points in time and with similar methodology in different socio-economic groups with diverse ethnic backgrounds. It would seem important, as well, to look more carefully and more intensively at special groups within the general divorcing population, e.g. children within one narrow age band, only children, children selected because of particular vulnerabilities or competences, and so on.

Out of such studies, we would learn not only similarities and differences in divorcing populations but would, perhaps, also be in a position to make observations regarding the universality of certain reactions or responses; for example, the extent to which responses are related primarily to such factors as age and sex, psychological competence or vulnerability which may override socio-economic or ethnic differences. (Our widespread consultation practice suggests this latter possibility.)

The formulation of appropriate control groups has been and continues to be baffling, in part because of the moral dilemmas in regard to children who are deliberately unserved, and in part because of the technical issues of gaining access to the intimate functioning in a family which is not highly motivated to share problems because it does not come for service.

Modern day consensus for issues of confidentiality, the right to privacy, and the nature of informed consent, as well as the conditions under which follow-up inquiry is allowable, have major moment for this as well as all other clinically based researches into peoples' lives. To what extent can parents either speak for children or give informed consent concerning the use of data derived from children (especially when the parental consent on behalf of the child can never be completely knowledgeable and hence truly informed)? How can the clinical and social and public policy needs for systematic and informed follow-up study be reconciled with people's rights to privacy and the at times clinical desirability of burying the past?

We have been strengthened in our conviction that research about children must find its primary data base in direct contact with, observations of, and interview with the children, and that parents, especially at a time of crisis in their lives, are not infrequently unperceptive or biased or otherwise deficient reporters in regard to the behaviors and feelings of children and adolescents. This requires, then, in socio-psychological inquiries into the problems of children, the use of investigators especially trained to work

directly with children and adolescents (as well as with adults, and in this sense even parents are only collateral adults).

And lastly, our kind of research in order to be most productive as research, as well as properly socially responsible, is combined with service in the form of a proffered program of ameliorative intervention. This clearly compounds the complexity of the assessment task, the delineation of natural sequences, etc. But correspondingly, it gives us access to the enormous richness of data that might be otherwise unattainable. We have, therefore, settled for a degree of inevitable confounding of the research data by the service interventions, in order not only to be ethically and socially responsible, but to be able, as well, to conduct this research itself.

And, as a related but distinct point, we have the issue of how to combine clinical and statistical research methods so that the findings of the research are true to the clinical data with full respect for their complexity and subtlety and yet as loyal to scientific requirements for formal rigor and statistical handling as the nature of the particular data permit. In this way, empirical clinical experience can be translated into increasing conviction in the validity and generalizability of the findings.

CONCLUSIONS

We have made several general observations about the divorce.

Divorce is a disorganizing and reorganizing process in a family with children. The process extends over time, often several years. Although it has, like most life events and crises, the potential for growth and new integrations, the road is often rocky and torturous, and many people underestimate the vicissitudes and difficulties of the transition. Our study confirms findings that we may reasonably expect a period of several years of disequilibrium before new, more gratifying job, social, and sexual relationships can become stable enough to provide comfort and a renewed sense of continuity. Perhaps

change extending over time is characteristic in adulthood and therefore should not be surprising. It is important to keep in mind that two or three years of disequilibrium in the life of a child may represent a significant proportion of his entire life experience. These observations are relevant to the timetable of an intervention program.

One of our central findings is that the entire post-separation period, rather than just the pre-divorce period or the divorce events themselves, and the functioning of the custodial parent following the divorce, are the central determinants in the young child's well-being at the end of the first year of separation. Therefore, the parent's functioning following the divorce, especially in the instance of the young child, is of crucial importance to the child's continued development and bears on the approach and timing of the intervention service.

We found, further, that, among older children and adolescents, the youngster's capacity to maintain his developmental stride, while not as closely dependent on the psychological and social functioning of the custodial parent, is nevertheless related inversely to the parent's need to lean heavily on the child for emotional and social sustenance and to involve the child in continuing battles and recriminations with the divorced spouse. It appears that there may be an optimum emotional distance between the older child and the parent that provides mutual support, yet allows for sufficient separation to protect the integrity of development. This distance can be breached all too readily by a continuation of the chaotic events and intense angers of the divorce and by continuing demands for alignment with the parent after the divorce. Such findings also affect the timing and content of counseling.

The period immediately following separation seems particularly useful, in terms of return on intervention efforts. Relationships are shaking loose from their moorings, considerable anxiety is generated in this process, and, in accord with crisis theory, the chances for effecting change in a fluid system are greatly enhanced. More particularly, divorce, as seen in our study,

represents a nodal point of change in the parent-child relationship, for the custodial as well as the non-custodial parent. In fact, the changes in the parent-child relationships in some age groups are at times startling and not predictable from earlier, pre-divorce modes of relationship. (Some 40% of the fathers of pre-school children in our study improved their relationship with their children in the first year following the divorce, with 40% of the mothers in the same group having deteriorated relationships with their pre-school children.)

Many decisions made during the divorce in regard to the subsequent structuring of relationships, including custody and visitation, have long-term consequences for the future of the child and the parent-child relationship. Yet, often the impetus and direction for these changes derive entirely from the stress-laden interaction of the family disruption. It would seem of considerable importance to provide the opportunity at this time for thoughtful consideration of consequences and alternatives. On the positive side, it appears that many parents, despite their own preoccupations, are relatively accessible to interventions regarding their children immediately following the parental separation; this is due to genuine concern, as well as to guilt, real and exaggerated, over what they perceive as past and present hurts inflicted on their children. Many, feeling they have wasted important years in an unhappy marriage, see the divorce as a second chance for themselves and for their children. Thus, the divorce period produces a three-cornered potential - a crisis-engendered capacity for (potentially helpful) change; the external demand for major decisions regarding future parent-child relationships; and a (sometimes) heightened motivation for improvement. Where these coexist, they can be brought together uniquely at this time to serve the best interests of the child.

Divorce has been compared to loss from death, in part because death and mourning have been widely studied in recent years. Loss is, indeed, a common denominator in both situations. Divorce shares with death the psychic and developmental hazard that loss in the external world will not be fully assimilated

within the inner world of the individual, as a result of unresolved ambivalence and intense unmodified need for the lost object. Unlike death, however, divorce presents for the child the continued availability of the departed parent as a live object for intense living-out of conflict and longing. Many children in our study were, at four years after the separation, holding fast to fantasies of reconciliation.

The complex psychological tasks imposed by the divorce are only partially resolved by the acceptance of the circumscribed loss. Beyond this, both child and adult must achieve new and complex changes in intimate relationships and self-concept, without the structural support and role assignments of the family system. These achievements ultimately involve the completed mourning of the loss of the pre-divorce family (and the renunciation of the aspirations attached to it), acceptance of the now circumscribed relationship with the non-custodial parent, and adjustment to the revised relationship with the custodial parent - all combined with the capacity to make use of newly-fashioned substitute relationships for growth. Such complex and painful adjustments can only take place over time, and it is unlikely that the child can achieve them without considerable help from parents or others.

Our findings underscore the significance of the family disruption as a stressful experience for the children and adolescents whom we followed. Although many of these children had lived for many years in an unhappy marriage, they did not experience the divorce as a solution to the unhappiness, nor did they greet it with relief. Many of the children, despite the unhappiness of their parents, were in fact relatively happy with their families and considered their situation neither better nor worse than that of other families around them. They would, in fact, have been content to hobble along. The lightening that struck them was the divorce, and they were not aware of any need to come in from the storm.

The initial responses of children and adolescents to the disruption of their families are strongly related to their age and stage of development. The stress of the family disruption appears to intersect with the child's developmental pathway. Although one must allow for a range of individual variation and difference, both in the child as well as in the family and in the surround, nevertheless, the responses of children fall into broad bands of identifiable behaviors which are related within a developmental framework.

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A P P E N D I C E S

1. Publications from the Children of Divorce Project.
2. Announcement of the opening of the service and description of service.
3. Therapist's form for semi-structured interview with parent.
4. Therapist's form for interview with child.
5. Outline for psychological profile of each member of each family.

APPENDIX 1

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE CHILDREN OF DIVORCE PROJECT

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Children of Divorce Publications - 2.

13. Wallerstein, J. & Kelly, J. Children of Divorce: Preventive Interventions in Parent-Child Relationships. In: Community Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis, ed. V. Bernard and J. Coleman, to be published, 1978.
14. Wallerstein, J. Children and Parents 18 Months After Parental Separation: Factors Related to Differential Outcome, National Institute of Mental Health, to be published, 1978.
15. Kelly, J. Children and Parents in the Midst of Divorce: Major Factors Contributing to Differentiated Response, National Institute of Mental Health, to be published, 1978.
16. Wallerstein, J. & Kelly, J. Children of Separation and Divorce, to be published, Basic Books, Inc., 1978.

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APPENDIX 2

COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH CENTER
CHILD & YOUTH DIVISION
20 H STREET
SAN RAFAEL, CA 94901

Counseling Service for Divorcing Parents and Their Children

The Child & Youth Division of the Marin Community Mental Health has initiated a new service which provides counseling for divorcing parents and their children.

The purpose of this counseling is to assist all members of the family through the difficult transition period once the decision to dissolve the marriage has been reached. It is not reconciliation or marital counseling.

We recognize that many parents are caught up in the stress of their own problems at the time of divorce and are not available to observe the effects of the divorce on their children, nor able to help their children express and work through their feelings about the divorce. The counseling is preventive and is intended to help both parents and children work with a neutral party in order to avoid possible future difficulties.

The service offered is as follows:

1. Short term counseling on a no-fee basis for parents and children.
2. All members of the family are seen during a six-week period:
 - a. Parents, either separately or together, are seen weekly;
 - b. Each child is seen at least three times;
 - c. During the service, we share our observations with parents and make recommendations for the future as indicated.
3. Families are asked to return approximately six to eight months later in order to evaluate their continuing needs.

Requirements for eligibility:

1. Families with children up to 18 years old where the parent(s) has filed for dissolution.

NOTE: Parents who have not yet filed but have reached the decision to divorce will be seen for one appointment if they wish advice re how to tell their children about the forthcoming divorce.

2. The final decree has been issued no longer than six months before the family applies for the counseling service.
3. Both parents must sign an agreement that the information they give us is confidential and is not for the use of the courts.

For further information, call 456-9350.

COUNSELING SERVICE FOR DIVORCING PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

The Southern Marin Children's Team of the Marin Community Mental Health Center has initiated a service to provide short-term counseling for children whose parents are in the process of obtaining a divorce. The purpose of the counseling is not reconciliation but rather to assist the members of the family through the often difficult transition period once the decision to dissolve the marriage has been reached.

Parents and children are seen for a six-week period in order to assist in the following ways:

1. To enable parents to understand that their role of parents continues despite the severance of the marriage relationship and to assist them in post-divorce planning for the children.
2. To help the children in working through their various emotional reactions to the forthcoming break-up of the family.

This service is seen as primarily preventive in nature and is designed to help families avoid future psychological problems of their children. It is, therefore, currently offered without charge. For further information, contact Dr. Joan Kelly, Community Mental Health Services, 20 H Street, San Rafael, CA. (456-9350)

CHILDREN OF DIVORCE PROJECT
Community Mental Health Center
250 Bon Air Road
Greenbrae, California

PRELIMINARY HISTORY GUIDE - COUNSELING WITH PARENTS

1. The marriage - history of marriage.

Nature of marital relationships, sources of marital discord, how openly has this discord been expressed? Over how long a period of time? How openly expressed to child and in child's range of vision? Prior attempts to resolve marital difficulties.

2. The marriage - present situation.

Legal status. Present attitudes of partners towards each other. Current range of feelings or dominant feelings, how are these expressed? How openly?

3. The marital partners.

1. Socio-economic - work, professional, educational (roughly). Life style, behavioral disposition, degree of strength and psychopathology, current affective state.
2. Self-image - changes from previous self-image to the extent that these are discernible. How this has been affected by the divorce.
3. Efforts to reorganize life plan and role.
 - a. Work
 - b. Friends
 - c. Recreation
 - d. Sex
 - e. Other
4. Approach to planning - drifting? planful (reality oriented)? immobilized? Over-organized?
5. How successful or unsuccessful does this attempt to reorganize seem to be at this time?
6. Expressed attitude toward the spouse and the children.

4. Parent-child relationship.

1. History of pregnancy and place of pregnancy within the marriage happiness or unhappiness. Overview of child's general functioning, earlier reactions to stress, special health or developmental problems, ways of coping, degree of neurotic disfunction, if any.
2. Responses to the divorce - new behaviors, new symptoms, new moods, new interests, new sublimations.

3. School performance in the past and the present, any changes occurring in the present.
 4. Recreational and sublimational outlets, any changes in these. Relationships with adults and peers, any changes in these. Quality of sibling relationships, support of siblings, recent alteration in sibling relationship.
 5. General patterning and division of parental role. Who does what with whom and when.
 6. Major gratifications and frustrations, concerns, etc.
 7. Other important idiosyncratic family patterns.
5. Extended family, community, and other resources.
1. Significant figures, e.g., grandparents. History of their relationship with the child, how supportive, geographical distance or proximity, familiarity with problems and with child.
 2. Significant others.
 3. Relationships with girl friends and boy friends of divorcing parents.
6. Present situation in terms of divorce.
1. What has child been told and by whom? Does partner know?
 2. What does child surmise, infer?
 3. How did child respond?
7. Projected divorce structure - plans related to children.
1. Financial.
 2. Living arrangements.
 3. Remarriage plans.
 4. Visitation plans. (If these have been in effect, how are they working?)
 5. Value agreement and differences between parents.
- How stable are these plans? How fixed or modifiable? To what extent have parents been able to come together around these goals and around this kind of planning?
8. Synthesis.
1. Diagnostic and prognostic impressions particularly in regard to the children and the adult's capacity to maintain parental role following the divorce.
 2. Intervention planning.
 3. Are parents in psychotherapy or is this indicated or contra-indicated?
 4. Are parents in counseling of some kind and is this indicated or contra-indicated?
 5. Is child in treatment and is this indicated or contra-indicated at this time?

CHILDREN OF DIVORCE PROJECT
Community Mental Health Center
250 Bon Air Road
Greenbrae, California

CHILDREN OF DIVORCING PARENTS - METHODS

The goal in seeing children in the Divorce Project is twofold:

1. To provide psychological service which will enable the child to assimilate the divorce impact and deal adaptively with the current and forthcoming changes in family relationships and family life.
2. To observe and record the spectrum of response and feelings, ideas, fantasies, and defense postures which seem to be associated with the stress of marital discord and the divorce itself. (Goal 2 should eventually enhance effectiveness in reaching Goal 1.)

The service provided for logically divides into two parts which psychologically are sequential but in reality may zig-zag back and forth. The child should be permitted first to express feeling, ideas, projections, fantasies, etc. Following this, he should be helped to actively contemplate the present and the future.

The following are tentative formulations regarding methods of approach and lines of inquiry in contact with the child:

1. The child should understand very close to the outset the purpose of the interview, in age-appropriate terms, and the examiner should also try to find out what the child has been informed by the parent. Ideas about the nature of divorce should be elicited.
2. Feelings regarding the extent of the acceptance of divorce should be explored without stimulating fantasies that the divorce can be undone. It is important to know whether the child understands the divorce to be inevitable or denies (parallel to feeling in mourning) and whether the child hopes that he or someone else can rescue the marriage and restore a better time that was, if there was such in the child's mind.
3. Ideas about the cause of the divorce should be elicited. It should be directly explained that children often have the feeling that they may be to blame. (Loyalty problems will figure prominently here.)
4. Feeling about the current and contemplated changes should be elicited, permitting as much range of expression as possible, including possible sadness to depression, primitive anger to "who cares?", relief, confusion, fear of the future, fear of being lost, the absence of feeling, feeling expressed privately vs. feeling expressed publicly, how much permission does the child have to express his feeling. All of these figure importantly.
5. Information should also be elicited regarding coping styles, as well as of strengths and adaptation, e.g., what do you do when they feel sad?

6. The child should be directly engaged to think about the future and how it will differ from the past in the detail of life. What would your daddy do? What will you do about this same thing? What will happen when Daddy visits? What would you like to happen? Can you discuss this with Daddy and Mother? What about allowances, rules, and privileges?

Also relationship to the remaining parent - how will it be different? Will Mother go to work? Are you worried about Mother? Will you need to be extra good all the time? Will you be able to tell her if you miss Daddy? What if Daddy says "yes", and Mother says "no"? Who will sign report cards, etc.? All these and others are aimed at helping the child face the future, emotionally and intellectually; using all of his ego strength and characteristic ways of coping, to come face-to-face with the separation process and changed structure of the relationship with the parents.

7. The children, if it is appropriate, should be asked whether it would be helpful to meet with both parents to make provision for some of these future arrangements, or whether feelings are too high and things too complicated at the moment to do this.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE OF FAMILY

CASE NUMBER: _____

PARENTS

Husband's version of reason for divorce.
Clinical picture of father at time of initial counseling.
Wife's version of reason for divorce.
Clinical picture of mother at time of initial counseling.
Father's attitude towards Project.
Father's expectations and disappointments.
Mother's attitude towards Project.
Mother's expectations and disappointments.
Technical problems and main strategies with father.
Technical problems and main strategies with mother.
Visitation patterns: Attitude of father
 Attitude of mother

CHILDREN

Total number of siblings: _____

For each child:

Age.
Sex.
Technical problems in seeing child.
Attitude of child.
Clinical picture at presentation.
Diagnostic statement.
Major issues and strategies.
Central fantasy preoccupations.

FOLLOW-UP

PARENTS

Clinical picture of father.
Clinical picture of mother.
Shifts in father's relationship with children.
Shifts in mother's relationship with children.
Shifts in interaction between parents.

CHILDREN

For each child:

Shifts in clinical picture.
Shifts in attitude.
Shifts in relationship with parents.
Shifts in fantasy preoccupation.
Diagnostic statement.

The Effects of Parental Divorce

Experiences of the Preschool Child

Judith S. Wallerstein, M.S.W. and Joan B. Kelly, Ph.D.

The Effects of Parental Divorce

Experiences of the Preschool Child

Judith S. Wallerstein, M.S.W. and Joan B. Kelly, Ph.D.

This paper reports upon part of a larger, ongoing inquiry into the effects of parental divorce on children and adolescents. The entire sample includes 131 children between the ages of 2½ and 18 years from 60 families who resided in 1971 in a metropolitan suburb in northern California, an area with one of the highest divorce rates in the world.¹ These children and their parents were studied intensively by an interdisciplinary clinical team at two points in the family life experience: shortly after the initial separation of the parents and a year later.

In this first report on the preschool children, we present the initial response of all 34 preschool children in our sample to the parental separation and pending divorce, and turn then to a fuller consideration of those 15 children (44%) who at the second check-point of our study appeared in significantly worsened psychological condition.

Despite the striking increase in divorce in this country, research into the immediate consequences and longer-term effects of divorce on children and on adults as parents has been minimal. A

Mrs. Wallerstein is in the School of Social Welfare, University of California at Berkeley, and Dr. Kelly is in the Department of Psychiatry, Mt. Zion Hospital and Medical Center, San Francisco.

This research has been supported since 1971 by the Zellerbach Family Fund, San Francisco, at the Marin County Community Mental Health Center. The project staff consisted of Mrs. Wallerstein, principal investigator; Dr. Kelly, co-principal investigator; Angela Homme, Ph.D.; Doris Juvinall Schwarz, M.S.W.; Susannah Roy, M.S.W.; Janet West, M.S.W.

This paper is an expanded version of a paper originally presented at the 8th International Congress of the International Association for Child Psychiatry and Allied Professions at Philadelphia, Pa. in July 1974.

Reprints may be requested from Mrs. Wallerstein, School of Social Welfare, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, California 94720.

¹ In 1972, the divorce rate in the United States was 4.0 per 1,000 population, in California 5.4 per 1,000, in Marin County 6.0 per 1,000. Between 1962 and 1972, in the United States, the rate of divorce has increased 81%, while the marriage rate has risen only 27%. A comparable analysis for California indicates a 96% increase in the divorce rate, with a 26% rise in the marriage rate.

discussion of this research and related clinical literature appears in an earlier paper (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1974). Our inquiry represents a first in-depth look at children of divorce, drawn from a normal population with no history of psychiatric or psychological contact. Prior to the family disruption, all of the children were considered by their parents to be within the normal and expectable range of development. They were seen in the divorce counseling service (established by this project at the Marin County Community Mental Health Center) on referral from family lawyers, pediatricians, and schools within the framework of a preventively oriented planning service for divorcing families with children. They were not referred as identified patients or as families in declared distress. The initial data were obtained in four to six individual clinical interviews with each family member over a 6-week time span. All subjects were interviewed approximately a year later,² and independent information was obtained from the schools at each of these times.

The overarching goal of the project has been the systematic exploration of differential responses of children at various ages to divorce-related family change. Our interest has been first, the observation and recording of the main response and experiences of these children and their parents; second, the teasing out of the intricate patterning of defensive, restitutive, and coping mechanisms employed successfully or unsuccessfully in response to the parental separation and the postdivorce family structure; and third, the understanding of the psychological, familial, and more broadly social factors in the child-family interaction which can be related to their altered condition. Finally, an additional goal of the project was the construction of clinical interventions specific to divorce, as well as the development of suggestions for community programs to assist divorcing and postdivorce families. An earlier paper delineates some of the dimensions of the adolescent experiences, and sets forth in greater detail the theoretical framework and research design (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1974).

RESPONSES OF THE CHILDREN

The 34 preschool children from 27 families can be divided into three distinguishable developmental clusters on the basis of their response to the separation experience. We propose to deal separately here with the children from each of these age subgroups.

² Another follow-up is in progress during 1974-75.

The Youngest Preschool Group (2½–3¼ Years)

The youngest children in our sample form a small cluster of 4 boys and 5 girls. *All* of these children responded to the family disruption with observable and significant behavioral changes, which included acute regressions in toilet training despite a history of stabilized control, increased irritability, whining, crying, general fearfulness, acute separation anxieties, various sleep problems, cognitive confusion, increased autoerotic activities, return to transitional objects, escalation in aggressive behavior, and tantrums. Some acted increasingly possessive of toys and other belongings. Several were preoccupied with maintaining "good behavior" and arranging gifts for their parents. While the extent and duration of each child's distress and symptoms varied, regressive behavior occurred in all of these children with no sex differences noted. Regressions occurred most precipitously in those children who had not been given an explanation of the father's departure. We note a similarity between the responses of these very young children to the parental separation and those responses described by Anna Freud and Burlingham (1948), Bowlby et al. (1952), and others following separation of children from the primary caretaker. This similarity in response is of considerable interest in that all but one child in this youngest sample remained with the mother in the family home, with no disruption in maternal or environmental continuity.

In the main, these children possessed very few mechanisms for relieving their suffering. Their play was burdened, constricted, and joyless as they constructed unsafe toy worlds inhabited by hungry, assaultive animals. Recurrent playroom themes were those of aimless, woebegone searching and trying dispiritedly to fit objects together. Sometimes, they essayed to clarify boundaries and master distinctions and linkages by asking uncomprehendingly and repetitiously of familiar objects, "What's this? What's that? What goes with what?"

By the time of follow-up, a year later, the regressions and enhanced aggression, the fearfulness, the possessive behavior, and the heightened questioning had disappeared in all but 3 of these children. Still evident a year later in children otherwise improved was a general neediness in relationships, expressed in a too-quick reaching out to strange adults for physical contact, wanting to sit on strange laps and cling to new hands. No relationship was found between the acuteness of the initial regression or the absolute number of symptoms demonstrated then by the child, and the psy-

chological health or developmental progress of the child a year later. Nor was there a connection between the child's resuming his developmental agenda and the mother's full-time employment when satisfactory arrangements had been made for the child's care. The relevant variable was the quality of the caretaking, whether that caretaking was assumed by the mother, father, or various substitute caretakers employed by the primary parent. In contrast to the older preschool children, these younger children seemed to tolerate substitute caretakers rather well, if those caretakers were consistent in the child's life and endowed with loving qualities. However, stability of location of caretaking seemed not a relevant variable in eventual outcome.

The Vulnerable Children in the Youngest Group. Of the 9 children in this age group, 3 were considerably more troubled at follow-up than at the time of the initial assessment. These vulnerable children were all living in families in which the intensity of the divorce discord had remained relatively undiminished during the intervening year. In each of these instances, the mothers were centrally preoccupied with their own hurt, humiliation, and unremitting fury at the husband. They were, therefore, unable to provide help or comfort to the child in integrating the divorce-induced changes in the family structure. Moreover, our material suggests that these mothers appeared to their children as powerful and terrifying in their potential for destruction. One little girl in this group approached the interviewer with the repeated admonition, "Don't hurt me!" While we saw different behavioral responses and symptom formations in these particular children, it is likely that a specific vulnerability is generated by the conjoining of the divorce-specific pathogenic environment described and the phase-specific dependence and helplessness of the very young child in this group. It is a tragic attribute of these settings that a tender attachment between the child and the departing father may render a child more vulnerable to the mother's unremitting anger.

Alex's parents married at the insistence of the paternal grandmother when the unwanted pregnancy was discovered. Although an unwilling and immature husband, Alex's father had developed an erratic, overstimulating, but apparently exciting relationship with his 3-year-old son. The father then abruptly abandoned his wife and child, returned to live with his own mother, and soon terminated contact with Alex, offering no explanation.

Alex's initial regressive response was similar to that of other children of this age. Despite the loss of toilet training, the return to his old security blanket, increased irritability, and acute separation

anxiety, his level of play and functioning at nursery school suggested that the child had previously achieved an age-appropriate developmental status. His mother, of foreign origin, responded to the separation and divorce with acute anxiety, anger, and suffering, which then moved into an immobilizing depression, reinforced by her social isolation and absence of available family ties. Despite our urging, she refused to discuss the father's departure with the child.

By the time of the follow-up, Alex's clinical picture was one of a consolidated childhood depression. He was spending several pathetic hours each day rocking in his chair while listening quietly to phonograph records left by his father, and making repeated attempts to contact his father on his toy telephone. Both activities suggested a desperate clinging to the introject and memory of his father in an effort to stave off a more severe disorganization. In addition to restlessness, sleeplessness, and an inability to enjoy play, the boy displayed newer, more ominous symptoms, including a facial grimace, occasional destructiveness outside of the home, and rapid, jerky hand and body movements while watching television. Removed from nursery school by his severely depressed mother, Alex had few outside contacts and was a child seriously at risk.

Our overall findings, of which this is one dramatic example, suggest significant and recurrent crisscrossings and linkages between the divorce and a breakdown in the functioning of the caretaking adult,³ with consequent serious impairment of the parenting capacity. Sometimes the mental disorder in the parent precipitated or accompanied the divorce; sometimes, as in the case of Alex, the divorce triggered a severe depression which not only seriously interfered with the mother's capacity to parent, but, as suggested, evoked a particular kind of pathogenic ambience which is specifically ominous for the mental health and development of the very young preschool child.

The Middle Preschool Group (3 3/4-4 3/4 Years)

The middle preschool group included 11 children, 5 boys and 6 girls. In this particular group there were no open struggles of parents over their children, and we were thus presented with an opportunity to see the effects of divorce as distinct from an agitated milieu. In contrast to the youngest group, in these children regression was not the favored initial response to the parental separation, and appeared in less than half of them. Many of these

³ Briscoe et al. (1973) have reported a significantly higher incidence of serious mental illness in a divorced population than in a demographically matched control group.

children, however, did become irritable, whiny, and tearful. Aggressive behavior and fear of aggression increased. Their separation anxieties seemed expressive, however, of specific phobic ideation and specific conflict, and lacked the more diffuse regressive quality which attached to the separation problems observed in the youngest children.

The children in this middle preschool group seemed painfully bewildered by the loss of one parent, and anxiously attempted to comprehend the present and future vicissitudes of their relationship with both parents. Their concept of the dependability of human relationships and of object ties was profoundly shaken, and they were frightened, confused, and sad. They voiced a desperate desire for a father: "We don't have a daddy anymore!" "I'll need a new daddy!" as well as sad fears of their own replaceability: "Will my daddy find another little boy?" Cognitive confusion about dissolution of the family unit additionally led some children to anticipate the loss of both parents. One child angrily said upon being scolded, "You're not my mommy! I don't *have* a mommy anymore!"

Fantasy began to assume more prominence in the overall response in this group. In accord with McDermott (1968), we found these children unable to master their anxiety and depression through play or to portray the external events of the family disruption. Instead, they played out with solemnity and sadness threats to their survival and their own overwhelming sense of helplessness. Or they quietly played house, placing both parents in bed together, sometimes in scenes where adults cared for adults and children cared for each other. Oedipal fantasies were offered, partly in the service of denial: "My daddy sleeps in my bed every night."

Play and language clearly reflected the self-blame from which some of these children suffered in response to the father's departure, as well as their own faulty attempts to cope by providing a reasoned explanation. One little girl attributed her father's leaving specifically to her noisy play; another to her messy, untrained dog; still another savagely beat "the naughty baby doll." These multiterminated self-accusations reflecting early superego development, coupled with feelings of helplessness in the face of powerful, malevolent, and incomprehensible forces, combined to reduce the self-esteem of these children. The overall effect was to hamper further their capacity to seek substitute gratifications and to cope otherwise. These self-accusations were found to be highly resistive to educational interventions by parents or by us.

The Vulnerable Children in the Middle Group. The central finding

with this middle preschool group; in which there was no overt family turmoil accompanying the divorce, is that nonetheless 7 of these 11 children (5 girls and 2 boys) were in observably worse clinical condition at the time of the follow-up. Among the 7 vulnerable children, the 5 girls had all performed well within age-appropriate norms at the time of initial assessment. Of the girls, 4 had looked especially intact; thus, the deterioration in their functioning was striking.

All but one of the children in this middle preschool group who appeared more troubled a year later had moved in a particular direction,⁴ namely, toward increased inhibition and constriction in play, fantasy, or behavior; diminished self-esteem, greater sadness and neediness; and a variety of symptomatic behaviors reflecting the intensity of specific neurotic conflicts. In their relationships with adults, these vulnerable children seemed driven by a need for physical contact, individual attention, and approval. Their capacity to form individual relationships with adults remained reasonably intact. Despite the young age of these children, they easily recognized the interviewers a year after the initial contact. The intervening year had made for a gradual, serious, but still not consolidated increase in anxiety and depression which was variously burdening, but not yet blocking the developmental process. No sexual differences were found in the patterns of these children's responses.

In our efforts to tease out the confluence of factors which contributed to the heightened vulnerability and downward course of these 7 children, we found the following highly suggestive. Of the 7 fathers of the more troubled children, 6 had various defined psychiatric disorders, including severe neurotic illness, chronic alcoholism, and psychosis. All of the 7 fathers had been powerfully, frequently, and often erratically involved in fairly harsh disciplinary measures and the setting of expectations beyond the capacity of these young children to achieve. Thus, in each of these families, the father's departure from the household not only resulted in the loss of a till-then present parent, but also immediately and radically changed the structure of external controls, the standards for conduct, and the methods of punishment. To add to this complexity, more than half of these men, after leaving the household, actually became freer, more open in good feelings toward their children, more consistent, and more accepting of their parental role. Thus, in addition to the hazards of these conflicted father-child relationships preceding separation and divorce, the complicated sequence of changing relationships following separation may bear

⁴ One girl showed increasing manic behavior and pressured speech, which may have been related to her father's chronic manic-depressive psychosis.

directly on the bewilderment, self-blame, and difficulty in integrating the divorce which these children experienced.

Further, 4 of the 7 mothers of these vulnerable children described a year of high tension and frenetic activity, sometimes in pursuit of realistic and ambitious life plans. During the intervening year they had attempted to balance demands of home, children, work, and continued schooling and still provide for their own postponed needs for social and sexual gratification. One sad, ironic, and unforeseen effect of the divorce was often a thinner, less nutrient, and less supportive relationship with their children, which the children may well have experienced anxiously as a partial, but additional withdrawal of love, indicating further disapproval and lack of interest. The fact that many of these mothers for the first time moved into the role of disciplinarian probably added to the children's confusion and feeling of partial rejection. In all, the newly evolving relationship between mother and child was in particular contrast with the special closeness and protectiveness these mothers had earlier extended to their children when shielding them from disturbed and harsh fathers.

Kate is one of the little girls whose intactness and playfulness impressed us at the initial evaluation. Her mother, troubled by intensifying psychosomatic symptoms and depression during a marriage marked by sexual deprivation and nagging criticism, finally decided on divorce "to improve the quality of life" for herself and her three children when Kate was 3¾ years old. Kate's father, almost a generation older than his wife, had a serious neurotic illness which included a symptom of severe anxiety when touched. Impatient and demanding perfection of his children, Kate's father frequently overtly rejected his children. The mother's conscious response to this was to feel that she had to be even more available to them, as playmate and protector.

When we first saw her, Kate was playful, articulate, and exuberant, relating warmly to the interviewer. Teasing and affectionate in comments about both parents, she offered the opinion that her noisy playing had caused her father to leave, and further volunteered that she was angry at him for leaving. Her play flowed easily as she constructed creative scenes of competing and cooperating animals. Alternating hunger and feeding were the dominant play themes throughout.

In the year and a half that followed the divorce, Kate's father dutifully continued weekend visitations, and was gradually able to establish a closer, less critical relationship with his children. Kate's mother entered a period of frenetic, scattered activity in which her hysterical personality traits were exacerbated by her efforts to com-

bine career, social life, mothering, and household responsibilities for the first time in her adult life. One consequence was a breakdown in the continuity of care for Kate because of a succession of many different babysitters, while the little girl experienced a decrease in attention from her own mother.

Kate was almost 5 years when she was seen again. Her condition had deteriorated; her affect was subdued, her play inhibited and less gratifying to her. The nursery school reported a "waiflike, sad child who wants touching," a child dependent upon one-to-one attention for learning, a child now unable to make friends. When seen a third time at age 6½, Kate appeared shy, withdrawn, constricted, was daydreaming excessively and failing to progress at school. Kate's mother said ruefully that she knew her child needed attention, but much as she would like, she could not organize herself sufficiently to provide it.

The Oldest Preschool Group (5-6 Years)

In the oldest preschool group were 14 children, 9 boys and 5 girls. Like the younger children, all of these children experienced heightened anxiety and aggression at the time of the parental separation, manifested by restlessness, increased whininess, moodiness, general irritability, separation problems, and temper tantrums. Unlike the younger children, children in this group seemed to have a reasonable understanding of the divorce-related changes. Also different within this older age subgroup were the response patterns, which were more diverse from the outset. Many children in this group were able in some way to express to the interviewer their sadness, their longing for their fathers, and their intense wish to restore the unbroken family. One child expressed considerable relief at the divorce.

There was a great deal of open fighting and continued high agitation, including life-threatening physical violence between the parents in many of these families in the oldest preschool group at the time of the separation and throughout the marriage. Thus, these children had been exposed to considerable turmoil in addition to the divorce itself. It is, therefore, of considerable moment that in this older group we encounter for the first time children who were in no way impeded in their developmental progress, their liveliness, or their self-confidence by the divorce events.⁵ One

⁵ At this age, we begin with some to see a developmental surge following the divorce, which can mark divorce as a stimulus to growth and maturity. We also note that those children who were doing well at the time of the divorce, despite the turmoil in the family, were mature, bright youngsters who were enjoying school and had begun to derive considerable gratification from these out-of-home activities separate from their parents.

of the other distinguishing attributes of this oldest group was the greater consistency between the clinical picture at the outset and at the time of follow-up. Consequently, in contrast to the two younger groups, the initial clinical findings had greater predictive value and could therefore provide a more reliable basis for early intervention or referral.

The Vulnerable Children in the Oldest Group. The 5 children in this oldest group (4 of them girls) who looked significantly worse at follow-up had showed troubled behavior at the initial assessment, including acute unhappiness, general anxiety, a panicky inability in some to discuss or think about the divorce, intense denial and reversal of angry and depressive feelings ("I'm happy all the time; everybody loves me!"), strong feelings of rejection and torment about being replaced ("Will daddy get a new wife, a new dog, a new boy?"), symptomatic behaviors of various kinds, including sleep disturbances, phobias, compulsive eating, aggressive outbursts, and a driven seeking of physical contact and attention from adults.

By the time of follow-up, the behaviors and preoccupations of these vulnerable children were consolidating into childhood depressions of varying intensities and pervasiveness. The crippling impact of this development on academic and social learning was attested to by the school reports, which independently described high restlessness, distractibility, fear of failure, excessive daydreaming, moving away from reality, poor peer relations, clinging to teachers' bodies, particularly their legs, and a compulsive searching for empty laps.

In fantasy and play, these vulnerable children restored the family, particularly the parental bedroom, and undid the father's departure. They constructed, as well, in a manner reminiscent of the two younger groups, stories of lost, hungry, and often naughty children who are saved by both parents and returned to safety. Fantasies of burning and exploding houses paralleled their increased aggressive behavior.

The most poignant fantasies were those elicited from the vulnerable girls at follow-up. Encapsulated and prolonged beyond age-appropriate expectations, these fantasies occupied increasing amounts of the child's psychic energy, and may have served to ward off a more profound depression related to the perceived abandonment by the father. Visitation patterns often stimulated peaks of excitement, not unlike courtship, alternating with recurrent disappointments following the father's departure. The potential teasing and seductive quality of such a pattern may well have served to deter the resolution of normal oedipal conflict. When we

saw Mary, 6 years, 4 months old at the time of follow-up, she told us that she still planned to marry her father. When reminded of the father's remarriage, she maintained confidently, "He might get a divorce [from his new wife], and *then* I would marry him!" Such nourishing oedipal fantasies, both self-sustaining and all too gratifying, were impeding the integration of the divorce experience and the entry into latency. As reported independently by the schools, all of the more troubled girls in this oldest group were suffering with impaired self-esteem, poor peer relations, and moderate to severe learning inhibitions.

This composite clinical picture of prolonged investment in oedipal fantasies, diminished self-esteem, and delayed entry into latency was a specific pattern in the oldest preschool troubled girls. Our data suggest this may be one predictable course for girls in this age group who are identified at the outset as vulnerable.

Ann, age 5 years, 2 months when first seen, was the youngest of five daughters of two chronically troubled people. Their marriage and divorce had been marked throughout by accusations, conflict, and physical violence. The final episode which precipitated the divorce was a paranoid attack upon the mother, which ended with the father's brief imprisonment. Ann had been the father's favorite child and had not herself been the victim of his violence. Her father moved away soon after the parental separation, but continued to maintain telephone contact with this child. Ann's mother had a history of deprivation and depression, and at the initial counseling was particularly agitated.

Ann reached out quickly to be hugged and kissed at the initial interview. She denied all sadness, maintained an overly bright, cheerful surface, and announced gaily, "Everybody loves me!" In response to the request for her three wishes, she asked for a funny face, a spider face, and an old witch's face. Despite these indications of significant inner distress, sadness, and anger, and a striking need to hold these feelings in careful check, Ann's overall adjustment, although somewhat immature, was well within developmental norms. At school she was considered to be learning appropriately and was "getting along well with peers" and teachers.

At the time of the follow-up, we learned of a fantasy which in the intervening year Ann presented to her teacher in daily installments. In this fantasy, her mother had given birth to a new baby for whom Ann and her mother jointly cared. The child described minutely to the teacher how they both rose at midnight to minister to the crying infant. Toward the year's end the teacher made a home visit, and was startled to discover that the new baby was the child's invention.

The many meanings of this poignant, multidetermined fantasy include the representation of the child herself and her unfulfilled wishes for nurturance, the undoing, reversal, and replacement of the father's departure by providing for the arrival of the new child, the representation of the child's desperate effort to find and identify with a good mother, and, of course, the oedipal child. Although Ann used the fantasy resourcefully to make real contact with real teachers and attempted in this way to cope with her loneliness, she was, at follow-up time, despite the teacher's warmth and continued concern, unable to learn in school, unable to sustain friendships with peers, and maintained a pressured chattering and an increasingly frozen, smiling façade.

By the time of the follow-up, Ann's mother had reconstituted her own behavior, functioned well in a gratifying job, had many different boyfriends, and was involved in a popular group therapy program. Her hectic schedule hardly included the care of this child. Ann was exhausted and depleted by the responsibility for getting herself to school, and for providing her own meals and bedtime routines.

SEX DIFFERENCES

At the time of parental separation, no discernible patterns of differential response distinguished the boys from the girls. Strong differences, however, emerged in the follow-up data. These findings of ours at follow-up are at variance with many statistical studies of the sexual distribution of child-patient populations in which boys invariably predominate. Thus, of 16 girls in our entire preschool sample, 63% ($N = 10$) were in significantly worse psychological condition at the time of the follow-up. By contrast, of the 18 boys, only 27% ($N = 5$) moved into the more troubled group at follow-up. These differences were apparent in the middle preschool group, in which 5 of the 6 girls were clinically more troubled; and in the oldest preschool group, in which 4 out of 5 girls had also deteriorated. Of the boys in the corresponding groups, 2 of the 5 boys in the middle group were in worsened condition; and of 9 boys in the oldest preschool group, only 1 appeared in deteriorated condition at follow-up. It will be important to determine whether these patterns of sexual difference in response and their variance from the usual distribution of child-patient populations persist into latency for these preschool children, as well as to examine and compare the distribution within the school age population ($N = 49$) of the entire study.

PARENTAL CONFLICT DURING DIVORCE

Of the 27 families in the preschool sample, 22 of the divorces (81%) were actively sought by the wives. The 5 divorces initiated by fathers were bitterly opposed by the wives, and in 3 of these cases, the rage continued without diminution in the year following the separation. While one half of the fathers originally opposed their wives' decision to divorce with similar bitterness, all of them had gradually, by the time of the follow-up, moderated their anger. Most of these men expressed satisfaction with their new lives. There is no evidence of a relationship between the initial turmoil, which in some cases approached chaos, surrounding the divorce events and the condition of the child a year later, except in those instances when the turmoil continued unabated during the intervening period.

CHANGES IN PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Divorce changes not only the marital relationship, but often the parent-child relationship as well. Shifts in parent-child relationships may occur at the time of parental separation, in the ensuing period of instability, and in the subsequent postdivorce family reorganization, which for some will include remarriage. The changes which occur following divorce often cannot be extrapolated from the relationship which obtained prior to the divorce. One surprising finding in our study is that by follow-up, twice as many mothers and fathers significantly modified the dominant cast of their attitude and interaction with their preschool child as remained the same. Many of the more anxious, conflicted, uncaring, or actively rejecting parents became freer, happier, and closer to their children by the time of the follow-up. Many of the mothers and fathers who had been close, friendly, and affectionate with the children prior to the divorce had moved by follow-up time a year later to a more estranged, more conflict-ridden, or neglectful parental role.

Father-Child Relationships

In following the course of the father's relationship with his preschool child in our total sample, we were interested to find that by follow-up, 44% of the fathers ($N = 12$) had developed a richer, more consistent, and seemingly more affectionate relationship with their children than had obtained prior to the divorce or at the time

of separation. A year later, 26% ($N = 7$) of our preschool fathers had decreased their interest and general investment, as reflected in visitation patterns and general attitudes expressed to us. These findings are surprising and somewhat at variance with general community views that father-child relationships can be expected to deteriorate following divorce. Despite wide geographic separation in some instances, a high potential for mobility, and many obstacles to continued contact created by angry mothers, very few fathers chose to move away from their children, and only 1 father in the preschool sample abandoned his child.

Corresponding changes occurred in the attitudes of the fathers of those 15 children found to be in worsened condition by the time of the follow-up. Of these fathers, 40% ($N = 6$) developed a more affectionate and less conflicted relationship with their preschool children. Only 25% ($N = 4$) diminished their interest (of these fathers, 1 abandoned his child totally, 1 moved away, the other 2 maintained erratic contacts but were not interested in these particular children). It would seem therefore from this sample that an improved father-child relationship does not serve sufficiently to forestall a postdivorce downward spiral in the preschool child, although the improved relationship may somewhat modify the downward course. An improved emotional interchange between father and child during visits cannot bridge for the preschool child the separations of time and physical unavailability which the postdivorce structure imposes.

This somewhat unexpected improvement in emotional interaction between father and preschool child may be related precisely to the constraints and limitations of the visitation contact itself. For some men in the total group, the external limits imposed by the postdivorce visitation structure seemed to provide emotional safeguards which enabled them to draw more freely on their capacities for patience and loving interest. For others, the disentanglement of their relationship with the child from the marital angers permitted the expression of a more affectionate and more sustained relationship. It is noteworthy that these improvements occurred despite the bewilderment and frustration which many of these fathers experienced in planning their visits with their preschool children.

Mother-Child Relationships

Compared with 30% ($N = 8$) of the mothers who maintained essentially the same predivorce relationship with their preschool children, a substantial number, 44% ($N = 12$), described a less gratifying, more conflict-ridden, and more limited relationship at the time

of the follow-up than at the time of the initial separation and prior to the divorce. Only 22% ($N = 6$) of the mothers were happier and more affectionate and more giving in their general relationship with their preschool children. Thus, in our sample, the mother-child relationship following divorce showed a reversal of the pattern observed in the father-child relationship: namely, as studied at the one-year follow-up point, the direction of change in father-child relationships is toward richer, more gratifying relationships, whereas for mothers, the changes are more in the direction of deterioration over this time.

Of the mothers of the 15 children who appeared in clinically worsened condition at follow-up, 9 mothers (of 10 children) described relationships with their preschool children reflecting aggravated tensions, anxieties, and diminished gratifications than at the time of the initial evaluation. These 10 children were receiving considerably less maternal support at the time of follow-up. Of these mothers, 3 were suffering with severe mental illness, exacerbated or triggered by the divorce, and had drawn the particular child more closely into their own psychological orbit at the expense of the child's own developmental needs. Of the remaining 5 mother-child relationships, 2 improved slightly from long-standing conflict-ridden patterns; 3 mother-child relationships remained essentially unchanged, but they too reflected long-term serious deficiencies.

Thus, a strong correlation which emerges in our study is between postdivorce changes in the quality of the mother-child relationship (which is not related to the mothers' being employed outside the home) and the psychological status of the child at follow-up. Our data underscore the fragility of the relationship between the single parent and the preschool child and the extraordinary susceptibility of this relationship to conflictful stresses from within, and pressures and deprivations from without.

CONCLUSIONS

We have presented the responses to parental divorce of 34 preschool children drawn from a normal population, studied at the time of the initial separation and again one year later. Although there was expectable overlap among the children and considerable individual variation, nevertheless, three subgroups emerged with discernible patterns of response broadly related to chronological age as well as to developmental and cognitive maturity.

1. In the youngest group, family disruption triggered regres-

sions, fretfulness, cognitive bewilderment, heightened aggression, and neediness. These symptoms were found to be temporary if continuity of physical and loving care was restored and maintained either by the parent or a competent substitute caretaker. The acuteness of the regression or other behavioral change seemed unrelated to the outcome. The most enduring symptom was that of pervasive neediness. The more vulnerable children in this youngest group showed depressive reactions and/or constriction and delays in their development.

2. In the middle group, divorce appeared to cogwheel with early superego development, specifically burdening the child's self-esteem and self-image. His view of the dependability and predictability of relationships was threatened, his sense of order regarding the world disrupted. Some children suffered with feelings of responsibility for driving the father away. Poor outcome here included early signs of depressive illness and, again, developmental inhibitions.

3. In the oldest preschool children, it became possible for the first time for a child to experience family turbulence and divorce without breaking developmental stride. In the main, such children seemed able to find gratifications outside of the home, and to place some psychological and social distance between themselves and their parents. In the vulnerable children, we saw particular difficulty in bringing resolution to oedipal conflicts, and consequent delay in beginning the tasks of latency. Poor outcome in girls in this group was related to the overuse of denial through prolonged oedipal fantasy and the turning away from reality tasks. Of particular concern is the early disruption in learning which may be difficult to reverse.

Of the total sample studied, 44% ($N = 15$) of the children were found to be in significantly deteriorated psychological condition at the follow-up a year later. This finding is of particular concern, since none of the children in this study had any prior history of psychological difficulty, and we considered that all of them had achieved appropriate developmental and cognitive milestones. Moreover, in recognition of the temporary regressions and frequent discontinuities of early childhood development, we employed conservative diagnostic criteria throughout the study. Our finding that nearly half of the preschool children deteriorated in functioning in the year following parental separation, if applicable to the large numbers of young children involved in divorce each year, has sobering implications.

Changes in parent-child relationships in the year following sepa-

ration were substantial. In particular, a diminution in the quality of the mother-child relationship occurred in almost half of our families, and was found to be strongly associated with the deterioration in the psychological condition of the child. Father-child relationships, on the other hand, often tended to improve over the first year, but this did not prevent the deterioration.

Divorce is intended, properly, as a social remedy for terminating unsatisfactory marriages. The authors do not propose that the findings reported here constitute an argument against divorce. Rather, our concern is with the generation of knowledge which will promote appropriate professional and social measures directed toward ameliorating the unhappy sequelae of divorce. It may be, for example, that some children can make do and grow with the relationship with two adults who, despite being in conflict, supplement each other, but that the diet becomes too thin in the aftermath of divorce when the father's availability is reduced, and the mother's relationship becomes attenuated. Neither extended family, nor school, nor community is prepared at the present time to move into these interstices.

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Responses of the Preschool Child
to Divorce: Those Who Cope

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Responses of the Preschool Child to Divorce: Those Who Cope

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In previous papers (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1974, 1975, 1976; Kelly and Wallerstein, 1976) we have reported the research design and the preliminary findings from an ongoing longitudinal study of the effects of parental divorce on 131 children and adolescents drawn from a nonclinic population in a suburban community in northern California. The forum for the first presentation of our data was an international conference in 1974, convened to consider children at risk.* Accordingly, we chose to examine first the children who seemed in significantly worsened psychological condition at the time of the first follow-up, one year after our initial assessment (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1975). In this paper I will discuss that cohort of preschool children who were judged, a year later, to be maintaining their previous good developmental pace, or appeared well on their way to recovery from an acute depressive or regressive reaction to the stresses of the family rupture and to the resumption of their developmental

This research has been supported since 1971 by the Zellerbach Family Fund, San Francisco. The project staff consisted of Mrs. Wallerstein, principal investigator; Joan B. Kelly, Ph.D., co-principal investigator; Angela Homme, Ph.D.; Doris Juvinall Schwarz, M.S.W.; Susannah Roy, M.S.W.; Janet West, M.S.W. A full report of the project will appear in the book, *Children of Separation and Divorce* by Judith S. Wallerstein and Joan B. Kelly, to be published by Basic Books, Inc., New York.

* Congress of the International Association for Child Psychiatry and Allied Professions, Philadelphia, Pa., July, 1974, "The child in his family: Children at psychiatric risk."

agendas or who were, in some instances, showing a developmental spurt and quickening.

Of the entire sample, a total of 34 children, 18 boys and 16 girls, were between the ages of two-and-a-half years and five years, 11 months. All of these children, as we have already described (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1975), suffered intensely from fear, bewilderment, worry, and profound sorrow at the disruption of their families. Fifteen of the 33 whom we reached at the first follow-up (45 percent) seemed significantly worse when reassessed a year later. These comprised five out of 17 of the boys (29 percent) and a dismaying 10 out of 16 of the girls (63 percent). In addition, four children (12 percent) were placed in an intermediate category and were considered to be adequately holding at their previous, somewhat precarious, psychological state. This report concerns the remaining 14 of the 33 (42 percent), nine boys and five girls, who appeared to have coped successfully with the stresses of the family rupture and competently negotiated the many obstacles of the first-year adjustment within the postseparation family—in brief, those children whose distress did not eventuate in developmental interference which could be discerned at that time.

Begun in 1971, the Children of Divorce Project has, as its overarching goals, the systematic exploration of the differential responses of children at various ages to divorce-related family change, as well as to those changes that occur consequent to the divorce within the parent-child relationship. This inquiry represents a first in-depth look at children of divorce drawn from a normal, in the sense of nonclinical, child population. Before the family disruption, all of these children had been considered by their parents and teachers to have reached appropriate developmental milestones. The children and their families were seen individually through the lens of clinical interviews averaging 14.2 interviews per family, extending over a six-week span, set within the context of a preventively oriented planning service which was established by the Project at the county community mental health center. Families were referred by attorneys, schools, physicians, and other community agencies within no more than a year after the parental separation and preferably as close as

possible to that separation. Initial data obtained in these four to six interviews with each family member over a six-week period were supplemented by independent information obtained from the children's schools. All family members were interviewed again individually by the same member of the interdisciplinary clinical team, within about a year following this initial extended contact. For most of the families, the follow-up occurred, therefore, at about 18 months after the parental separation.

In consideration of the extraordinary high return of the families for follow-up (58 of the original 60 families) and the finding of such high incidence of continuing or increased distress among the children, we decided to follow the original group further, and in 1976 completed another round of examination of the same youngsters, now four to five years older. Some of the data from the second follow-up are included in this paper.

In earlier reports we stated that decline among the preschool children was not associated with the degree of escalating turmoil before or surrounding the divorce decision, or with the subsequent full-time employment of the custodial parent (most often the mother), if good caretaking arrangements were available to the child. Rather, it appeared that decline in the preschool children seemed linked to the psychological and social ambience of the entire postseparation year, and more specifically to fragility, serious instability, frenetic activity, or depression in the custodial parent, or to unremitting anger between the divorcing spouses which encompassed the child—in brief, with seriously diminished parenting (sometimes unavoidably so). Decline appeared linked, as well, to the intolerable pain of rejection or desertion by the departing parent. In addition, we found that children age three to five, especially little girls, were particularly vulnerable to the effects of the family disruption which appeared to pose a grave threat to their self-esteem, as well as to school adjustment and early learning.

The task of identifying and understanding the children who coped successfully has been even more difficult in that it brings together a host of major unresolved theoretical issues in our field. Existing knowledge of pathology and breakdown is considerably greater than

the understanding of stress resistance and the recovery process. As White and his co-workers stated in 1973, "Nowhere in the literature could we find a detailed description of a healthy, well-developed six-year-old human" (White et al., 1973).

Further, it is well known that some loss of function occurs in all children in the face of threatening experience. The operation of stress as a challenge evoking greater efforts at mastery is little understood. And beyond these considerations, individual variations in coping style, idiosyncratic patterns of recovery, and different developmental time tables that are affected by biological, psychological, and social parameters interacting complexly make it difficult to delineate linkages and causal sequences.

Lois Murphy (1976) recently distinguished two major strands of the coping process: by coping I she means the capacity to cope with opportunities, challenges, frustrations, and threats in the environment; this she differentiates from coping II which she defines as the capacity to maintain internal integration in the face of stress. Although it overlaps in some significant regards, the distinction has particular relevance to children of divorce because of the wide range and subtlety of the possible psychological sequelae to the family disruption. Obviously, coping which is immediately or soon evident in successes in school, in relationships with peers and adults, and in the relative absence or brief duration of serious psychological and physical symptoms is easier to observe, to compare, and even to measure. The capacity to maintain inner integrations is stickier, in that it speaks to issues of capacity to overcome severe disappointment and rejection and a host of anxieties without the impairment of the child's potential for spontaneity, loving, appropriate anger, and compassion in his continuing emotional and moral growth. Many of these observations can be made only within the context of a close, intimate relationship that has developed over time.

For our judgment of competent outcome, we have, therefore, attempted a combination of methodological approaches. We have used clinically derived criteria, employing as a measure the comparative judgment of the same examiner, assessing each child against the baseline of how he or she appeared to the same therapist a year

later in the context of the clinical relationship. In addition, all of the children we considered improved met accepted developmental norms which reflect age-appropriate and socially expected educational, intellectual, and social achievements.*

Important in this context is our insistence on the developmental perspective as the touchstone of our assessment of the kinds of enduring resolutions achieved by these children of divorce. In this regard, any single cross-sectional vantage point can, by itself, be deceptive for assessment purposes—for example, the lesser visibility of the feeling life, especially the more tender feelings of the child that is such a usual characteristic of latency as a developmental phase. And even more crucial as a reason for long-range follow-up and perspective is our growing awareness that long-range continuities in development are less established than we once thought, and that so many of the circumstances that might elicit creative or deleterious consequences of the childhood trauma, like the challenge and the stress of being oneself a marital partner and a parent, lie in the distant future for these young subjects and are plainly not predictable in any way from our knowledge at this time. Given these considerations, our research strategy has been that of stepwise assessment of the progression through and the mastery within each successive developmental phase, in each instance as measured against the normative standards we have for it.

My goal in this paper is to delineate some of the salient differences that obtained in the family relationships of the children who improved, as against those whose condition worsened. I shall attempt, as well, to note the supports which the improved children had available to them, or which they themselves constructed in their seemingly successful efforts to maintain their developmental course. Finally, the initial responses of both groups will be compared; some of the psychological attributes and psychic mechanisms that characterize these improved children's efforts to cope will be noted, together

* The children judged to be competent also met most of the criteria described by Garnezy and Nuechterlein (1972) in their detailed summary of the literature, both published and unpublished, on competent economically disadvantaged children.

with the possible psychological cost to the child of successful adaptation to family rupture.

THE YOUNGEST PRESCHOOL GROUP

The youngest children in our preschool group, who were between two years, six months and three years, three months when first seen in our project, form a small cluster of nine, four boys and five girls. All of these children initially responded to the family disruption with a wide range of behaviors, including acute regression, heightened aggression and irritability, fearfulness, separation anxiety, bewilderment, acute sadness, and tears. Although the extent and duration of each child's distress and symptoms varied, regressive behavior occurred in all the children with no sex differences noted. Similarity between the responses of these children and those severe responses described by Anna Freud and Burlingham (1943), Bowlby, Robertson, and Rosenbluth (1952), and others following separation of young children from their primary caretakers was observed, although in our sample all but one child remained with the mother in the family home.

The four of these nine children who seemed in reasonably good psychological condition a year after this initial contact (three of five girls and one of four boys) did *not* appear different in their initial reactions from the children whose progress was considered poor. Indeed, for two of the children who were later considered to be doing well, the initial reaction was especially severe because separation of the parents resulted in the loss for them of their primary caretaker, the father for one little girl and the mother for one little boy in this subgroup. The initial response to separation was seen, therefore, to have little predictive or prognostic usefulness at this young age.

All four of the improved children in this youngest preschool group experienced a diminution of turmoil in the parental struggles and increased order in their homes during the intervening year. This is in accord with the findings of Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1975) that the household disorder usually peaks at about one year post-

separation. By contrast, the intensity and sense of ongoing conflict and/or depression were relatively unchanged or even heightened in the home of the three children who appeared worse at follow-up. Although still unsettled in their various new roles, three mothers of the improved children had nevertheless begun to make progress in jobs, in return to school, and in finding new and more gratifying social and sexual relationships. The one custodial father, although still in distress, had gradually during the year come to terms with the finality of the divorce he had not wanted. These four custodial parents had established adequate caretaking arrangements for the children, routines had become reestablished, and life had become a reasonably predictable experience. Visits with the noncustodial father were regular and emotionally supportive for two of the children. Although two others continued to feel disappointed in the relative disinterest of the visiting parent and the infrequency of the visits, there was no outright rejection or desertion.

All of these custodial parents had, in response to our brief six-week intervention, been able to modify their behaviors with their children in ways that would assure the child of the parent's continued caretaking and concern. Our data indicate that the parents of the children who improved were those who were able to make good use of our counseling and, by the same token were, perhaps, parents who brought psychological intactness and sensitivity to their parenting role, despite their sometimes distraught behavior at that time. Contrariwise, the parents of the children who got worse had difficulty in using advice constructively. For example, one mother of a severely depressed child rejected our suggestion that the father's departure be discussed with the boy, insisting that he was too young to understand.

Perhaps the central point of difference of the children's experience in these two groups was the fact that the parents of the children who improved did not place the child centrally in the continuing parental struggles. The parents of the improved children were able to maintain a relative separation between their needs and ego boundaries and the needs and ego boundaries of the children. Two parents of the children who did poorly in this group brought their

children into the orbit of their anger and depression and maintained the young child as their constant and often only companion. A third mother seemed, in her restless agitation, almost oblivious to the needs of her children and was angrily arranging a move to a distant city, with no plans for continued contact with the children's father who had been visiting regularly.

The stability of the environment of these four improved children can at best be considered marginal, and their improvement, therefore, may reflect as well the stress resistance and coping capacities of the children themselves. As judged at the one-year follow-up, their environment still held many risks. Thus, one child had been left by his mother and was being cared for by his devoted but hard-working father, at great psychic cost to the father; three mothers were working full-time for long hours, with limited skills and poor pay. Two of the improved children were repeatedly hurt and disappointed in their relationship with the visiting father.

The complexity of the task, the successful struggle of the child, as well as the possible psychic cost to the child, are illustrated by Karen who was two-and-a-half years old at the initial contact. After her parents separated, Karen regressed in her toilet training, exhibited frequent temper tantrums, refused to eat her breakfast, exhibited irritability, whining, demanding, clinging behavior, and a profound sadness accompanied by silent crying when alone in her room. To the bewilderment of her mother, she became suddenly preoccupied with staking out claims throughout her world, asserting crossly "This is mine. That is mine." Karen and her hard-pressed mother were locked into an escalating cycle of frustration and mutual irritation which peaked daily when the mother returned from work. Her father, who had been a major parenting figure, visited irregularly.

A year later, Karen at age three-and-a-half appeared bright, lively, outgoing, and fairly sunny. Still in a somewhat unstable living arrangement, she was dividing her week among the separate homes of her two parents and her baby-sitter, spending several days each week with her mother who worked full time, several with her father and his steady girlfriend, and all day long some days in the home of her baby-sitter. She seemed able to make these complex transitions with-

out visible strain and with a clear sense of reality that astonished us in such a young child. She volunteered cheerily, referring to her father's female friend, "I have two mommies and one daddy." In an extraordinary summary of her situation and functioning, she balanced a little toy chair perilously on the gabled roof of the dollhouse, noting "It's safe. It won't fall." The child's relationship with both parents was improved at one year. The father had resumed an important role in her care, and the mother, with considerable advice from us which she had been able to use well, had deescalated her own activities and organized her life with the child. The mother also was beginning to feel both relief and some happiness in her work and her social life, although she was still under considerable pressure.

Seen almost three years later, Karen appeared to be a bright, assertive, no-nonsense, sturdy six-year-old. She aggressively explored the consulting room in its entirety, playing every game in the office. To our surprise, she remembered the dollhouse and the toys. More to our surprise, she remembered the house where she had lived before her parents separated, when she was two years and one month old. She recalled their fights at that time. She said, matter-of-factly and without discernible sadness, that her parents still fight: "I'm used to it. They just don't like each other at all. They even fight over what's good for me. I'm used to that, too." She added, with some disdain, "They fight over little things." When asked what she does when they fight, she retorted, "What do you think I do? I leave the room, of course." The only clue she gave to continued underlying upset was her response when asked for advice regarding what to tell a six-year-old whose parents were undergoing divorce. She hesitated considerably and then offered, "I'd tell her a joke, or make her laugh. I don't like to see children unhappy. It makes me nervous." At school, Karen was reported to be an excellent student but given to tense, shrill verbal outbursts and having some difficulty in making and holding friends. The teacher found that she could calm the child best by placing her on her lap and did so on occasion. The school was also aware that the child spent a lot of time after school without adequate supervision, and that she sometimes came to school

without lunch, at which time the teachers scurried about to provide for her. Sometimes the child would suddenly make remarks to the teacher: "My mother bought me 15 dresses yesterday." Or, "My mother gave me lots of money yesterday. Just lots and lots." The teacher had been moved to considerable caring and compassion by what she sensed as Karen's loneliness. Some mothers in the neighborhood will not permit their children to play with Karen because, in their view, she has so little supervision.

This case highlights several conceptual issues in this subsample of the children who improved. Karen has, in accord with the criteria of White et al. (1973) which emerged in their observation of competent preschool children, been able to get and maintain adult attention, to use adults as resources, to learn well, to show pride in her achievement, and to express a desire and interest in growing up. Or, in terms of Murphy's (1976) conception of coping I, Karen has demonstrable competence in her capacity to deal successfully with her environment, in response to the perceived threat. Specifically, Karen makes good use of her intelligence, perceptiveness, clarity, excellent memory, aggressiveness, courage, and flexibility, and of her capacity to reach out and maintain emotional contact with people. Yet, she has been and remains lonely and at times intensely unhappy. Much of her neediness, her unfulfilled longing to be cared for, her desperate concern with what belongs reliably and predictably to her, is in the process of being covered up, denied, and transmuted into a bratty, sometimes hard, sometimes jaunty early independence, reflected in her manner and in her precocious, almost adolescent, jaundiced view of her parents. Her interviewer remarked wryly, "This is no child to entrust with family secrets at a party." Karen's need to avoid and deny emerges most clearly in her suggestion that the unhappy child whose parents are divorcing should be told a joke, as well as in her sudden assertions to the teacher of her mother's extraordinary indulgence and bounty. We may ask, what is this youngster's capacity to be responsive to her own feelings, to her needs for comforting, to many needs that remain unmet? To what extent, also, is it possible for Karen and other children like Karen to receive from other adults, namely from teachers and other people

in their environment, the affectionate care and consistent concern that Karen feels are lacking in significant ways at home, despite the efforts of both her parents and their genuine, albeit conflicted, concern and affection?

Finally, we must ask, at what point in her development is it appropriate to observe and assess outcome? For example, the degree to which Karen's defensiveness is related to her entry into latency and her consequent need to resist regressive pulls and reject intense feelings may only become evident from the hindsight of observation in later life stages.

Karen's overall psychic state at this time can best be summarized by her parting story at our last interview. She drew a building on the blackboard and told the following story: "It's a hospital. A little boy just came home from the hospital. He was hit by a car, but now he's OK." And she sailed out.

If we look at the other improved children in this youngest subgroup, at least three are bright and perceptive and well able to make use of language to communicate with their parents and with us. "Daddy, let's have another talk," Jimmy said, as he started to cry on the way home from their visit with his mother. These children showed a good sense of reality discrimination and seemed able at an early age to separate fantasy and reality. They did not seem to take blame for the divorce in their family. We were somewhat surprised at their responsiveness and pleasure in their contacts with us, some of which must also have been evident in their relationships with their teachers and baby-sitters and may well have resulted in the development of their own support system. Only a few weeks after his mother had suddenly left the family, Jimmy, with sweetness and not a little flirtatiousness, threw his arms around the interviewer and surprised her with a kiss as he left his second hour. All of these children struggled hard to understand and explain the family disruption and to deal with the loss. They used projection: "My sister is a crybaby. *She* cries for my daddy." They used denial through fantasy: "My daddy sleeps in my bed every night." But when pushed, the child admitted sadly, "I don't really see him enough." They reversed the loss and transformed it into a gain: "I have two families

now. I have two mommies and one daddy." And they held steadfastly and loyally to their relationship with their mothers and fathers. Karen rejected her mother's boyfriend's overtures crossly: "You are not my daddy!" Among the responses we saw at the end of the first year in many of the improved children were stoical acceptance, courage, early independence, sometimes brattiness, and early capacity to modulate needs and feelings in relation to others, and a capacity to bear loneliness and psychic hurt without enduring regression.

THE MIDDLE PRESCHOOL GROUP

The middle preschool group consisted of 11 children, five boys and six girls, age three years, nine months to four years, 10 months at the time of the first assessment. Although the turmoil around these children was moderate and no custody battles were threatened, the incidence of poor outcome in this group was dismayingly high. Seven of the ten children whom we reached at follow-up, two boys and five girls, were worse than when first seen. Three children appeared better: two boys and one girl. And of these, one boy who had initially been considered by us in serious psychological difficulty, had been referred at the assessment time for psychotherapy. Accurately, therefore, only two children of 11, one boy and one girl, in this middle preschool group can be considered within a category of relative stress resistance.

The two children shared at the outset the worries, fears, and pre-occupations of their peers who became worse. Like all the children in this group, they, too, were initially painfully bewildered by the family disruption, and frightened at what they considered to be their own replaceability and the possible loss of the remaining custodial parent. Unlike the other children in this group, these two children who improved seemed less blaming of themselves for the family disruption and the father's departure.

Frank was one of the children who improved. First seen at age four years-three months, Frank had been his mother's favorite child, and his self-esteem, although shaken, was still high. At the time that we saw him, he was frightened. He was fearful of losing both parents

and had become clinging, tearful, petulant, and sulky at home. He refused to discuss the family rupture with our interviewer and denied any unhappiness, although he was obviously in considerable psychic pain. He offered, with a conscious effort to save face, "I don't miss my father. I see him all the time. It's just like always." Our gentle efforts to probe led him to question his mother on the way home from the interview. He asked, "Is Daddy going to get another wife? Another dog? Another little boy? Who is to blame?" Although he allowed himself to ask these questions of his mother, at no time with us or with his mother did he express the many acute feelings attached to these questions. Throughout his several hours of contact with us, Frank produced many drawings of animals, of flowers, sometimes a family portrait that included both parents. Otherwise he spent his time straightening up the office, lining up pens, papers, and toys in rows to his liking. We were interested in his nonexpression of fears, angers, or concerns directly, either in conversation, play, or art, and his use of the office as a microcosm in which he could reestablish the order, continuity, familiarity, and control that were absent in his world at that time. We were also interested that he complained when his sessions ended.

By the first follow-up, Frank had reorganized. He appeared charming, confident, calm, serious, and poised. He seemed to have made an early entry into latency, was proficient in sports and considered an excellent student. He was intensely competitive in school and with his peers.

Frank was age eight and in third grade when he was seen again in the second follow-up. He had sustained severe stresses in his life in the intervening years, including one parent's major operation. He had begun to show some strain, which was reflected in complaints of fatigue, difficulty in concentrating at school, and preoccupation with fantasy superheroes. Yet, in all, he was still doing exceedingly well. He had entered a new class that year, in a new school, with very aggressive boys who banded together to exclude him. Frank had learned judo, and by the end of the year had established himself by "socking a kid in the mouth." His intense competitiveness with peers continued in school and on the playground. He was described as

having good relationships with parents and teachers. The interviewer commented, "Frank struck me as a fine boy with a great deal of intelligence, sensitivity, and good looks. Yet, I missed a sense of humor and the playlike features that one finds in many eight-year-olds whom I see. His pleasures seem tied to competition—hard competition—and winning." When asked for advice for a child whose parents were divorcing, Frank said seriously and stoically, "I'd tell the kid to live with it (the divorce)—to try not to worry. It will turn out OK." For the parents, he advised, "Take care of him. Have fun for him. Have some treats for him, too." Frank also raises issues similar to those represented in Karen, namely, the question of the extent to which his capacity for pleasure and play may have been sapped by his extraordinary and successful response to the many severe stresses of these past few years. His intense competitiveness and drive to win may have served him in good stead in maintaining his developmental course. They may propel him to very high achievements but may also have a psychological toll, whose full effects on his emotional life and capacity for contentment may not yet be evident.

Although we shall not attempt to generalize about this group from these two children, Frank also illustrates one of the important findings with these children, namely, that there is little evidence in our study that preschool children who are able to articulate their feelings necessarily do better than those who deny, avoid, or otherwise shy away from such expression. It is difficult to assess how much of any child's behavior reflects restraint, reserve, conscious avoidance, and/or denial, or an admixture of these. Nevertheless, the fact remains that several of the preschool children who improved were not able or willing, in their contacts with us, to express in play or conversation or drawing the feelings that could be inferred from their tenseness, restlessness, and symptomatic behaviors. Our evidence is that they did not talk to other adults, either, at this time.

These improved or stress-resistant children, by and large, did have, in our experience, a remarkably clear and differentiated perception of happenings in their particular world and of many of the details and implications of the family rupture. This clarity was often not found in their peers who did poorly, in whom we more often found

a denial of the events, a clinging to fantasy remarriage or reconciliation, and a lack of clarity in separating wishes from reality. It seems important, in this regard, to distinguish denial of the reality from denial of painful feelings or fears. It is possible that the improved children are those who are able to be clear about the reality but are able, often, to avoid, deny, conceal, or otherwise dose or titrate their painful feelings until they feel able to deal with these in their own good time. These observations have obvious implications for clinical assessment as well as for program. It is important to intervention theory that such avoidance or denial of feelings at the initial contact, namely at the time when the stress is at its height, is not predictive either of the adjustment at a later date, or of the later capacity to deal with these feelings successfully.

THE OLDEST PRESCHOOL GROUP

The oldest group of preschool children included 14, nine boys and five girls, who were between the ages of five years and five years-11 months at the initial assessment. At the time of the parental separation, many of these children experienced heightened anxiety and aggression, which became manifest in their restlessness, whininess, moodiness, general irritability, and symptomatic behaviors that included phobias, sleep disturbances, compulsive eating, aggressive outbursts, and a driven search for physical contact and attention from adults. These initial responses to the family rupture seemed more diverse, from the outset, when compared with those of the younger children.

In addition, one of the distinguishing attributes of this older preschool group was the greater consistency between their predominant psychological stance at first observation and the characteristic patterning of defensive and coping mechanisms evident at the year's end. The children who were worse at follow-up were, with one exception, very troubled at the initial counseling. Similarly, all but one child in this age group were improved or in relatively good shape at the initial counseling. Therefore, these initial clinical findings may have somewhat greater predictive value and can, perhaps, be used

somewhat more reliably for early intervention and referral than those of the two younger preschool groups.

Several of the oldest children seemed, from the start, capable of maintaining some degree of psychological distance or perspective vis à vis the parental conflict. One boy expressed what seemed to be genuine relief at being separated from his father. Several others, despite their anxiety, sadness, and anger, appeared able to continue their lives in school, play, and with peers without significant impediment. At follow-up, these children were members of the group that was doing well. In all, seven of the 14 children in this older preschool group (50 percent), six boys and one girl, may be considered to come within a subgroup of stress-resistant children who had indeed been able to experience the family separation and the ensuing year of disequilibrium without evident long-term detriment to their psychological development. The vulnerable children included four girls and one boy who appeared significantly worse at the first follow-up, and two additional children, both boys, who continued to appear as vulnerable at follow-up as they had at the earlier examination, although they had not lost ground.

Much like that of the younger improved children, the mother-child relationship of these improved youngsters seemed to have improved by follow-up. The intense turmoil and parental fighting present in five of the seven children's families at the time of the initial evaluation had diminished. And in all except one of the families, the mother was feeling better than at the time of the initial examination.

Several of these mothers had special relationships with the boys who improved. Of the six boys in the improved group of older preschool boys, three were the only boys in a sibship of three and enjoyed a preferred relationship with their mothers, especially when compared with their older sisters, whose relationship with their mothers was burdened by overt conflict and anger. The pattern of preferential treatment of the boy was particularly evident in the two families in which the one boy was also the youngest child. The one girl in this group of children who improved was also the youngest child and had been, from the start, closely identified with her mother. Her

older brother was encountering considerable difficulty in his adjustment in the family.

Yet, by and large, it should be said that most of the six mothers of the improved children were undergoing considerable stress in the year following the parental separation. Only one mother was, in fact, competent and intact in her functioning at follow-up. Three mothers had a history of serious somatic illness complicated by psychological components and sequelae. Two mothers among the three had sought the divorce after painfully extricating themselves from a humiliating marriage in which they had suffered physical and psychic abuse over many years. A fifth woman was suffering from chronic depression. At least two of these families were in serious economic straits; three mothers had begun to work for the first time after the parental separation; all but two were worried about finances. Yet, with one exception, none of these women burdened their children's visitation with their fathers, nor were the children subjected to criticism or rejection if they expressed interest or eagerness in seeing their fathers. In brief, these children were not made to feel central in the continuing parental struggles, despite resentments that continued to smolder in four of the six families.

Of the six oldest preschool boys who improved or held onto previous good adjustment, two openly regarded the diminished contact with the father as an opportunity to establish a not unwelcome distance. David, age five, the youngest of four children, had been the object of his father's most significant attachment during the marriage, as well as the target of his frequent, bitterly sarcastic, critical outbursts. His mother attributed the deterioration of the marriage in part to parental rivalry over the child's affection. David appeared, in his initial contact with us, as a whiny, immature, unhappy little boy who was anxiety-ridden at school and on the playground and stridently tyrannical at home. After the parental separation, the father began to visit weekly, but his visits included all of the siblings together, and the relationship with David became, as a result, less intense, less all-encompassing, and less geared to serving the father's changing moods and pressing needs. David expressed satisfaction with this new arrangement. At the end of the first year, the boy appeared

to have made almost two years of growth; he was significantly freer to use aggression in his relationship with his peers, considerably less fearful, and surging ahead in academic and social learning. At the four-year mark, the report we have indicates that the boy, now age nine, is still doing splendidly and is a source of pride to his mother and his teachers. Before the second follow-up, the family had been living for several years at a considerable distance from the father. It may well be that circumscribing the pathological relationship with the father has promoted this youngster's development.

If one looks at the quality of relationship between these fathers and the improved subgroup of oldest preschool boys, it seems that four among six had fathers whose relationships with these children were profoundly disturbed. The attenuation of these relationships, however painful to the children, may have nevertheless set the children free from bonds that were impeding their development. All but one of the children in this subgroup saw their fathers four times a month during the first year. None of these fathers deserted or overtly rejected their children. One father moved to a distant city and saw his son on holidays and weekends. The father's relationship with the one little girl in this improved group was closer and warmer at follow-up than at the time of the separation, when he refused to visit for several months because of his pain and jealousy.

Of the three mothers who had remarried at the time of the first follow-up, two of the children had important and loving relationships with their stepfathers. For example, Frances, whose mother remarried shortly after the divorce, acquired a new stepfather and several older brothers at the same time. Frances occupied a special place in this household as the only girl and the youngest child. This role seemed to enhance her feminine identification as well as her closeness to her mother. The child's unusual prettiness, charm, and warmth were significant factors in evoking the gratifications she received.

At least three of the children in this oldest preschool group seemed to have been protected from the pressure of parental needs and from exposure to parental violence and seduction by the presence of another sibling who more directly sustained the pressures of the parental needs and conflicts. It is of interest that of two brothers in

one family in this oldest preschool group, the older boy showed signs of considerable psychological deterioration at the end of the first year, whereas the younger one seemed to have negotiated the year's hurdles with more success. Of seven improved children in this older preschool group, six had older siblings of whom three were more troubled youngsters, and two additional older siblings were locked in angry conflicts with the parents which seemed to have been precipitated or exacerbated by the family separation. (Of the two children who improved in the middle preschool group, both children had older siblings, one of whom was in considerable psychological trouble, and the other suffered with a chronic physical disability.)

Academically and socially, the seven improved children in this older preschool group were doing well at follow-up. One child had a minor speech problem for which he was in therapy, and another seemed to have some minor reading difficulty. Three of the children about whom there had been mixed reports at the time of the initial evaluation were now considered excellent students. Larry, for example, whose teacher had reported mood swings, day-dreaming, and reading difficulties at the time of the first assessment, was considered a model student at follow-up. By and large, these children related well to peers and to their teachers. These reports stand sharply in contrast with the findings regarding the children in this age group who deteriorated, where we were particularly concerned with the number of serious learning difficulties and disturbed relationships with peers.

It also seems clear that these children were using their relationships with teachers and other students to provide themselves with needed supports and, in effect, to construct their own support systems. This emerged in part from the pleasure and warmth with which many of their teachers discussed these youngsters. Furthermore, the reports on these children who were doing well at school were sometimes at minor variance with their behavior at home, suggesting that these children were able to shift their behavior in response to the demands and gratifications of the setting. Our finding regarding the significance of the school in providing support for these children has important implications for the school and for the teacher.

It seems that the school and the classroom often provide the only continuity available to the child at the time of the divorce.

In noting other support systems available, it should be mentioned that a somewhat higher percentage of these children than the children who did poorly had grandparents who were concerned with their welfare and were helpful to the children directly or to the custodial parent. Two of the extended families lived close by, and the children visited them frequently. Others provided vacation homes and financial help.

An accelerated push toward increased maturity seems to characterize the older preschool children who improved. In a sense, their turning away from the stresses of the family disruption, and their wish to escape the conflicts between their parents, moved them more quickly into the next developmental stage, whose hallmarks are increased independence from the family, diminution in the intensity of parent-child relationships, and movement outward toward school and playground with new adult models and new peers. It may be that the departure of the oedipal father accelerated this outward movement in these children, in part as a result of their need to avoid the danger of a regressive pull to the relationship with a reactivated pre-oedipal mother, as well as the danger of being left alone with a powerful oedipal mother who had, in several of these children's fantasies, banished the father and won the family turf. It should be noted that this increased independence represents, as well, an adaptive response to diminished caretaking. Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1975) reported that young children of recently separated parents are more likely than children of married parents to get pick-up meals, to eat irregularly, to eat separately from the custodial parent, and to put themselves to bed.

Each of these children seemed able to make his way into the new early-latency territory, to perform at least adequately in various new roles, and to become the kind of child who engenders positive responses from the new adults, in effect to be bright, responsive, highly motivated, and capable of mastering the rules and meeting the requirements of her or his peer society. Moreover, these same children were able to adapt to new stepparents without overwhelm-

ing conflict and without sacrificing their attachment to the noncustodial visiting parent. Solnit (1970) has suggested that released aggression may be a significant component in the so-little understood process of recovery. And it may be that these improved children have been able to harness the rising aggression, which we observe in so many children in response to family disruption, to advance their entry into the next developmental phase. If so, their use of newly available aggressive energies, combined with the self-propelled move outward away from the family conflict, would shed some light on what has been observed as a developmental spurt that can occur in response to stress.

It is, of course, not possible at the present time to know whether these adaptive behaviors are the consequence of stress resistance or represent its component parts. Viewed at close range, these children showed the capacity for perception with regard to their families and an ability to accept the family rupture as a reality with a minimum of subterfuge and self-blame. How much of this reflected a conscious, studied scanning of the family landscape is hard to judge. We were often impressed with the acute social sensitivity of these children. Tom drew himself with large eyes and enormous ears, reflecting perhaps both the intensity and the strain of needing constantly to assess the world around him. The children seemed able, despite their own pain, clearly to distinguish their wishes for reconciliation from the reality they perceived. John told us how much he missed his father and how much he wished to live with him. He added, with great sadness, "But, he does not want to live with us any more." The children worked hard at explaining the separation, even when it made no sense to them at all. Frances insisted that her parents divorced because of fights about "mail and taxes." The children made judgments about right and wrong. Tom, who was surrounded by adult violence which included gun possession and threats of killing, told us that it was wrong to give vent to anger. Several children showed a capacity for planful, independent, multistep activities. At follow-up, Frances told us that her remarried mother was working very hard with her newly acquired large family. Therefore she, Frances, had decided to dress herself and do much for her own care,

to help her mother. Her perceptions were, like those of her peers, realistic, pragmatic, and detailed.

Of the entire group of 14 improved children at the one-year point, we were able to reach 13 at the four-year mark. For these, our very preliminary analysis reveals that a goodly number of family changes have occurred in their young lives, including several remarriages, a second divorce for one, a pending divorce for another parent, and a partial reconciliation. Only three of the 13 children were found to be in overt distress. The remainder, who were examined by the original clinician, were considered to be still within appropriate developmental norms and doing adequately or well in their psychological and social functioning. All three of the children who had deteriorated in this interval seem profoundly affected by what they felt to be their fathers' disinterest or rejection.

SUMMARY

Of 34 preschool children seen shortly after the parental separation, a total of 14, or 42 percent, seemed one year later to have weathered the initial postseparation period and to have resumed the developmental progress which had been briefly interrupted in most instances. The factors that differentiated the environment of these improved children from that of their peers who fared less well seemed related centrally to the reestablishing of caretaking, reasonable routines, and adequate parenting by the custodial parent. Additional factors that emerged as important in the environment of these improved children included the capacity of the divorcing parents to keep continuing angers and conflicts separate from their relationship with the children; the availability of a good school system and teachers with time and sensitivity to offer individual support and encouragement to the child; appropriate distancing from a pathological parent-child relationship, where this preceded the divorce; and the absence of overt rejection or desertion by either parent. Siblings seemed, as well, to offer a buffering support to younger children, sometimes at the price of their own increased conflict with a distressed parent. Relationships with a stepparent, particularly the

marriage partner of the custodial parent, seemed also to have growth-promoting and comforting potential for some children.

The initial responses of the younger preschool children who improved at one year were indistinguishable at that time from those whose psychological and social functioning later declined. By kindergarten age, differences could more often be distinguished at the outset, with the children who declined during the first few months after the separation showing more troubled behavior a year later.

The children who seemed to cope successfully with the stress of the family disruption were intelligent, perceptive, and courageous, and they had the capacity to make do with less time and less caretaking and to become increasingly independent, as well as to develop their own supports outside of the immediate family. They were propelled by this adaptation along the developmental ladder toward greater independence and earlier entry into the next developmental stage. Some seemed able to make this complex adaptation without openly expressing their intense feelings and fears, as long as they were able, cognitively, to face the reality of the divorce and to be assured by trusted parents of continued love and care.

Our findings are that the children who were improved at about 18 months after the parental separation had, by and large, fought a successful battle to overcome their initial acute fright, conflict, self-blame, and grief. As part of this adaptive process, which eventuated in their continued development, they were able to circumscribe, to bypass, or to deny their wishes and/or their expectations for the parenting and caretaking that had been their experience before the family rupture. It seems likely that a significant underlay of sadness, neediness, and unfulfilled longing is a significant aspect of their childhood experience during the several years following the parental divorce. This persistent underlying sadness, combined with early self-reliance and early entry into the next developmental stage, seemed to have important implications for character development, including particularly self-concept and relationships with adults and peers. The limitations of our knowledge, the wide range of individual difference, and the particular restrictions that attach to psychological observation during latency preclude long-range predic-

tions. We will, in future publications, report more fully on outcome, as seen at the four-year mark.

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THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL DIVORCE: Experiences of the Child in Early Latency

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CLINICAL

THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL DIVORCE: Experiences of the Child in Early Latency

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This paper discusses the impact of divorce on 26 children in early latency, as observed shortly after the initial parental separation and one year later. The material is part of a larger clinical study, begun in 1970, of 131 children and adolescents from 60 divorcing families.

In 1974, more than a million children in the United States below the age of 18 were affected by the divorce of their parents. Since 1962 there has been a 135% increase in the number of divorces. The steady rise in the divorce rate, from 2.2 per 1,000 population in 1962 to 4.6 per 1,000 population in 1974, is a national trend that shows no sign of diminishing.

Despite this large and growing population, systematic research regarding the impact of divorce on children is still in its beginnings. A very few studies have reported the responses of pre-school children^{3, 5} and adolescents⁴ at the time

of the parental separation and shortly thereafter. None have dealt with school age children, the largest single group affected.

This paper, on the responses to divorce of the young school age child, is the first of two papers describing the initial impact of divorce on children during latency.

CHILDREN OF DIVORCE PROJECT

Begun in 1970, the divorce project was designed to observe and record the impact of divorce on each family member as discerned shortly after the initial parental separation, and again one year

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later. The research goals were combined with efforts to develop clinical interventions specific to divorce for children of different ages and for their parents.

Method

Families were seen in the Divorce Counseling Service, established at the Community Mental Health Center by this project and offered free of charge to families where one parent had taken the legal step of filing for divorce. Referrals came predominantly from family lawyers, schools, Protective Custody Division of Juvenile Services, community agencies, and self-referred parents.

Each child and his parents were seen by a member of an interdisciplinary clinical team during four to six individual clinical sessions conducted over a six-week time span. All subjects were invited to return for a follow-up evaluation one year later.* Independent information was obtained with parental consent from the schools at the time of the initial counseling and a year later.

Information obtained included the following: 1) the pre-divorce family history, including parent-child relationships; 2) family interaction at the time of the intensifying and sometimes violent conflict, including sibling relationships; 3) parental descriptions of communications to the children regarding reasons for divorce, caretaking, and visiting arrangements; 4) the child's initial and ensuing responses, as observed by parents, school, child, and therapist, including play and fantasy configurations; 5) the availability of support systems within extended family and community; and 6) the capacity of the parents to

use intervention models adapted to the vicissitudes of their particular divorcing situation.

Subjects

The entire sample included 131 children and adolescents from 60 families residing in a suburban Northern California county. All were drawn from a normal population, and were considered by parents and school to be functioning within normal developmental and intellectual limits. Children with a history of psychological difficulties were referred to related clinical services. The 60 families in the project had been married an average of eleven years before filing for divorce, with a range of three to 23 years. Average family size was 2.2 children, with a range of one to seven children. Average age of the fathers at counseling was 37 years, mothers' average age was 34 years.

Social class distribution, as determined by the Hollingshead Two-Factor Index, was: Class I: 23%; Class II: 20%; Class III: 29%; Class IV: 18%, and Class V: 10%. Caucasian families represented 92% of the sample, three percent were black, and the remaining five percent interracial marriages included Oriental and Chicano parents.

At the first follow-up one year after the initial counseling intervention, two of the 60 families refused to return. In six additional families, the children were unavailable for follow-up, but one or both parents were seen in each instance.

THE CHILD'S RESPONSES AND THE DIVORCE PROCESS

The central event of the divorce process for most children is the parental

* A second follow-up was in process at the time this paper was submitted for publication.

separation. This event evokes or greatly intensifies the predominant initial responses of the child. In this regard, the child differs from the adult, for whom the central event of the divorce may vary widely. While for the adult, the separation enhances the reality of the divorce decision, the significant emotional event may be, for example, the difficult decision in itself, the angry discovery of infidelity, or the hurtful recognition of desertion. The child frequently perceives the parent's departure as a departure from *him*, personally. In addition, the physical departure of the parent and the parent's belongings, and the continuing absence of this parent, make the family disruption undeniably real. This experience precipitates a spectrum of responses which may or may not be observable to the parent. In this respect, the central event of divorce for children is psychologically comparable to the event of death, and frequently evokes similar responses of disbelief, shock, and denial.

Divorce is a process which includes a complexly interrelated series of both external and internal events, and is often characterized by a disequilibrium approaching severe disorganization. For many families, this process extends over several years. Rarely does the post-divorce family structure stabilize within the first year following the parental separation. The initial responses of children precipitated by the separation and divorce must be set within the context of the divorce process. The prolonged disequilibrium is frequently accompanied by a decrease in the emotional availability of the custodial parent. For the young child, this period of disorganization may represent a substantial portion of his total life experience, or may span phases

of development considered critical to later adjustment. Thus, the initial responses of the child, combined with discontinuity in parenting, have the potential for consolidating in ways detrimental to the child's future development.

THE TWO LATENCY GROUPS

The concept of latency as a two-phase developmental process is not new.^{1, 2} As traditionally defined, early latency included children aged five-and-a-half through seven, older latency, ages eight to ten. Our findings suggested a different age demarcation, however, in terms of commonality of response to divorce. The 57 children between the ages of seven and ten in our sample were identifiable as a distinct group in their major initial responses to parental separation and divorce along several dimensions. Their experiences were clearly distinguishable from the five and six year olds. The variations were considerably sharper than anticipated, and reflected developmental differences in perceptual, cognitive, affective, and defense configurations. Accordingly, the five and six years olds were separated from the early latency group, and will be considered in a separate publication focusing on the impact of divorce on oedipal conflict and its resolution.

The seven to ten year olds in this study, despite shared common responses to the parental separation, also evidenced distinguishable differences in their respective capacities to deal with the divorce. The younger latency group, seven and eight years old when their parents separated, were more immobilized by their suffering, and their defense organization was more vulnerable to regression. The older latency children showed greater capacity to grasp and

integrate the more extended consequences of the family disruption. Further, parent-child relationships in each of these groups followed a different course. For these reasons, the major initial responses to divorce of children in early and later latency are considered in two separate papers.

This paper discusses the initial responses to parental separation and divorce of 26 children, fourteen boys and twelve girls, who were seven and eight years old when seen for the initial counseling intervention, following their parents' separation. A second paper,⁶ discussing the responses of 31 children aged nine and ten when first seen, will appear subsequently.

INITIAL RESPONSES OF THE EARLY LATENCY CHILDREN

While the experience of each child is different, and determinants underlying their responses were varied, it was possible nevertheless to identify common themes characteristic of the children of this age group in our sample.

Sadness and Grieving

The most striking response to parental separation and intent to divorce in the younger latency children was their pervasive sadness. Unlike the pre-school children in our sample,⁵ who made extensive use of denial through fantasy, these children, more than other age groups in the study, were aware of their suffering, and had great difficulty in obtaining relief. Sometimes the intensity of a child's distress was directly related to the amount of turmoil generated by one or both parents, but some children suffered acutely where there was no overt parental upset.

The impact of divorce appears to be

such that the use of age-appropriate defenses, including denial by fantasy and reversal, do not hold sufficiently under the stress, resulting in intense pain and immobilization. Further, unlike adolescents or adults in mourning, the ego-structure of the child in early latency is such that he is less able to utilize denial alternately with the experience of suffering in order to titrate the painful experience over time. Neither has this age child achieved sufficient ego integration and capacity for autonomous planning such that he can provide for his own relief with sublimated activities, or organize individual or group activities in the service of coping. In this respect, he brings to mind the pre-school children who were unable to obtain relief or mastery of the impact of parental separation through their play.^{3, 5} And while some parents planned ways to help their children cope with their distress, many were too preoccupied with their own bitterness, humiliation, and plans for revenge to be supportively available.

More than half of these younger children expressed their sorrow directly within the supportive structure of the counseling interviews.

Roger, age seven, started the first hour by asking if the therapist had heard the "bad news" of the divorce. He felt "very, very sad about the split" but maintained he couldn't cry. "I have to hold it in, 'cause I'd be crying all the time." Roger observed it would be very embarrassing to cry at school. He mournfully related how he gets his own breakfast and lunch because his mother didn't get up in the morning like she used to. "She must be sick." Roger knew there was trouble from the beginning: "They only knew each other two days and they *should* have known each other at least nine days before getting married!" He sadly recounted to the therapist his unsuccessful efforts to break up his parents' fights.

For some children, the depressive re-

action was more all-encompassing, and their whole world seemed filled with symbols and events of death, damage, loss, and emptiness.

Jenny was tense and reluctant to talk, remembering at first only that she told her parents "over and over," long before the divorce, "You'd better *not* get a divorce." Her sense of emptiness was poignantly conveyed by her inability to think of three wishes, stating instead she didn't have any favorite things "in school, at home, or anything." Jenny's mother had told her divorce was better because she would have *two* places to live and visit. Jenny, doubtful, said, "I'll wait and see." In the second interview, she wondered sadly why children usually live with their mothers, expressing again the wish to live with both parents. After a tired sigh, Jenny talked worriedly of her dog's heart attack, then the therapist's doll: "Poor little thing, she doesn't have any eyes." In the last interview, Jenny volunteered that she had finally thought of her three wishes: "First, that my daddy would come home. Second, that my parents would get back together. And third, that they would never, ever divorce again." Sadly she said, "It will never happen, I won't get any of my wishes."

Mary, seven years old when her parents separated, sadly described her vision of divorce as, "It's when people go away."

Some children made extensive use of avoidance and silence, but were keenly attentive to the therapist's gentle words.

Richard, eight years old, at first unable to express any thoughts or feelings about the divorce, listened in intense silence while the therapist talked of feelings and concerns other boys and girls his age had when their parents divorced. "How can you be so smart to know that?" he asked with considerable awe. His play during the sessions revealed a child preoccupied with his own vulnerability, his feeling that nothing in his world was safe from attack.

Others maintained their strong verbal denial of sadness during the sessions, but fell back upon a complicated pano-
ly of defensive maneuvers when the

interviewer introduced the use of play and art.

Dan, age eight, stoutly maintained he didn't have too many problems about the divorce and was glad it was over. When asked to draw his family, Dan instead spent the entire hour on a compulsively elaborated drawing of his house, talking lovingly of each added detail. Dan anxiously questioned if he should put *everyone* in his family in the drawing, including his kitten, now dead of leukemia, but eventually declined to draw any family members. Only at the end of the last session did Dan admit to a "tiny problem" of wanting to see his dad more.

His mother was angrily attempting to prevent any contact with the boy's father. Despite his heroic denial, Dan's anguish about the divorce was all too evident in his attempts to avoid discussing it, his admitted loneliness, and the great interest expressed in other families that were divorcing. The compulsive yet loving attention given to drawing his home represented strong effort to cope with his pain and avoid experiencing sad affects, but at considerable psychic cost. Dan requested another interview several months later to talk of the "awful bad problems I'm having at night," but then couldn't remember what they were.

Finally, some children vigorously addressed themselves to peripheral issues. In some of these youngsters, developing symptomatic behaviors became apparent.

Karen, age seven, cheerfully admitted she had one problem with the divorce, that of finding her father a place to live, while she ignored the frightening reality that her parents were locked in a loud and angry custody battle for virtual possession of the child. Karen's compulsive overeating and weight gain since the separation were highlighted in her puppet play, as she directed the whale to say, "Please make me not eat this poor little girl." Later she warned the therapist, "You'd better not ask me any more about the divorce. . . . I'll get hungry."

Her fears of starvation were reminiscent of the themes of hungry, needy animals

seen in the play of the pre-school children,^{3, 5} but her compulsive overeating suggested her coping efforts were none too successful. This child's loyalty to both parents caused her to struggle helplessly with her fears of betraying either parent.

Only a very few children shut the therapists out completely and refused to talk or play. This appeared to reflect a fragile coping effort which would not withstand outside intrusion.

Tom, age eight, was being pressured by his mother for total allegiance. In response to the therapist's efforts to discuss his parents' divorce, Tom said, "I have thoughts, but I don't want to talk about them."

Fear

Most of the younger latency children were frightened about their current unstable family situations, as well as their futures. Crying and sobbing were not uncommon, particularly among the boys, and therapists noted many children on the brink of tears as various aspects of the divorce were discussed. For many, the dissolution of the family was perceived as a threat to the whole arena of their experience. The majority, both boys and girls, indicated they felt their world had been severely shaken. They worried there was no safe place for them to take refuge, reflecting a belief that the protective family structure was necessary for their safety and continued growth.

An extreme variant of the shared fear and anxiety in response to the divorce and parental separation was that of an acute reactive disorganization and panic, seen in three of the 26 children.

Greg's father came back to the family home shortly after the separation, and chased his

estranged wife through the house with a shotgun. Greg ran into his mother's closet and, seemingly out of control, pulled down his mother's clothing. Found crying and falling on the floor, Greg said, "If Dad had shot you, I was going to wreck your closet." For two months after the incident, Greg was sleepless and tearful, with increased irritability and problems in impulse control.

Sonia rushed into her classroom and announced "with glee" that her father had moved out the night before. Soon thereafter, she began vomiting her breakfast, and alternately clung to and angrily shouted at her mother. Fearfully and repetitively she asked her mother, "Don't you love me?"

For Sonia, the separation meant the loss of the parent that clearly favored her, while she remained in the custody of a rejecting mother who openly preferred her sibling. Terrified now at the possibility of being wanted nowhere, Sonia in panic was painful to observe.

Feelings of Deprivation

Fantasies of deprivation pervaded the hours of many children, conveyed either directly as feelings of loss or insatiable hunger, or reversed in play and fantasy.

Larry, seven years old at counseling, told a convincing story of mother's boyfriend depriving him of breakfast after she left for work each day, and invented a nude male figure who fed him as much breakfast as he wanted.

Others became intent on obtaining new and fancier bicycles, clothes, or toys, and tried to enlist the therapist's support in persuading parents of their need. Fantasies of elaborate and gratifying vacations, or of being an indulged only-child, conveyed as well the sense of deprivation created by the family dissolution and the accompanying need to fill the emptiness by fantasy or reality gifts.

Some children also became increas-

ingly possessive and were reported by parents or teachers to have increased difficulties in sharing with their siblings or classmates.

Fantasies of Responsibility and Reconciliation

A very few children openly admitted to thoughts or worries that they had caused the divorce, and in two cases, both girls, the children seemed to assume primary and complete responsibility.

Eight-year-old Debbie, psychologically intact yet saddened and bewildered by her mother's decision to divorce, anxiously admitted that her failure to relay an important message from one parent to the other had precipitated an intensely heated argument leading to the divorce. The therapist's efforts to explore the parents' divorce action with Debbie and provide some reassurance of her innocence were met with considerable skepticism.

Another child blamed his father for the divorce, but then suddenly asked, "You don't think I caused that old divorce, do you?" In a later session, he told the therapist that his father left "because I'm dumb."

However, feeling responsibility for the divorce was *not* a predominant response evident in this younger latency group. This is in contrast to the pre-school children, who more frequently assumed they had a role in precipitating the divorce.⁶ Most of the latency children rather abruptly denied any feelings of responsibility. Whether the quick denials were a function of the heavy reliance upon denial characteristic of latency, or actually portrayed a more mature cognitive grasp of parental responsibility in divorce actions, would be difficult to determine without more prolonged therapeutic contact.

Wishes for reconciliation, by contrast,

were widespread, open, and enduring in these children. All but one of the 26 children in this age group strongly wished for the restoration of their intact family. For some, the wish was a preoccupation interfering with their functioning in many spheres. For others, the forlorn wish for reconciliation of the parents was accompanied by the realization that the divorce would occur despite their wishes. It is important to report that *none* of the children was pleased or relieved with the divorce, despite a history in many of these families of chronic, often violent marital conflict to which most of the children were witness. The maxim of divorce as better for children than continued marital friction is one with which these children would disagree.

Relationship to the Departed Father

Sense of loss. Central to this younger group of children was the very strong sense of loss with regard to the departed father. More than half of the children missed their father acutely. Many felt abandoned and rejected, and expressed their longing in ways reminiscent of grief for a dead parent. While it is not surprising that most children miss their father as a result of the separation inherent in a divorce action, the intensity of the response in this age group was striking. Those most affected were boys, in particular the younger ones. The degree of closeness and gratification in the pre-divorce father-child relationship, at least from our perspective, was not a factor in determining this acute reaction. One father had been quite remote and occupied himself out of the home, another had been abusive and intolerant, a third loving yet psychologically obtuse.

It may well be that boys newly into latency who have barely consolidated their oedipal resolutions are heavily burdened by the separation from their fathers. Developmentally considered, the boy in early latency has only recently renounced the gratification of the oedipal mother, but in divorce loses the father as well. Further, the separation from the father at such a critical time may also threaten to disrupt processes of identification with the father.

The Visiting Situation. It was little comfort to these children that they saw their father on occasional visits. The typical visiting pattern of two weekends a month, established by custom and the court, was clearly not sufficient to fulfill the expectations of the seven- and eight-year-old boys. Such a pattern was experienced by most as depriving and as inadequate to nourish and make gratifying the relationships. Nearly all of the children in this sample longed and wished for more frequent visits with their fathers. The only children reasonably satisfied were those who could bicycle over to the father's house several times weekly, and where such frequent visits had the approval of both parents.

In addition to the infrequency of contact, many children felt the brunt of their parents' bitterness and continuing rage toward each other as it was re-enacted during the visits. Thus, in addition to coping with their own sorrow about seeing father less, the children had to endure anger as the quid quo pro for the opportunity to visit.

Eric, eight years old, twisted a rubber band nervously as the therapist talked about his father. Holding back tears, Eric wiped his eyes and nodded as the therapist gently said, "You must miss him." Bravely he added, "But I can see him any time I want." When asked

what happens if he wants to see his father between visiting weekends, Eric tried to be casual: "Oh, it's okay, it's usually not important." Painfully, quietly, Eric then talked of their unlisted phone number, obtained by his angry mother to prevent the father from calling his children. The absence of free communication greatly increased the possibilities of mishaps in visiting plans. Eric told of an incident when his father and sister failed to hear Eric calling at the apartment gate, whereupon he had to return home to call his dad. Once home, facing mother's anger, Eric decided not to call his father. The mother then called the father herself, venting her rage. After Eric's father arranged to pick him up a block from home, a scene ensued between Eric and his mother, Eric crying and refusing to visit his father, the mother angrily insisting he must. As the therapist reviewed the event, Eric's sadness and hurt feelings began to emerge, as did his feelings of rejection by his father. Anger towards either the mother or father was not expressed and could not be elicited. Like all the children in this younger group, Eric was especially highly defended against expressing anger toward the father.

Such conflicted and ruined visits with the absent father were common, as one or both parents took the opportunity to use their children as a vehicle for the expression of their own intense anger. These young latency children seem unable to defend themselves, and suffer intensely as a result. This is in contrast to children in late latency,⁶ who more freely express their anger, and the adolescents in our sample,⁴ who simply refuse to let their parents use them in such ways, or, if used, exact their price in angry battles with the parent.

Need for the father. Some of the younger boys in this sample urgently requested their mothers to remarry.

Soon after the separation, Jack asked his mother to remarry, stating that he needed to have a daddy of his own for himself.

Roy told the therapist he would like it if his mother married, because "Well, I'm just used

to having a father around the house." He doesn't, on the other hand, want his own father to marry because his dad would have more time to visit him if he remained single.

Others expressed a need for their father around to provide discipline and external controls. This developmental need or dependence of the child on the father for providing certain protective functions, as well as being a role model and companion, is of central importance to children in early latency. It may also reflect the boy's fear of living alone with the oedipal mother. This wish for a father's presence was expressed more often by eldest boys or male only-children.

Relationship with the Custodial Mother

Anger. In contrast with the difficulty in expressing anger at the father for being left, there were some children in our sample, mostly boys, who expressed considerable anger at their mother for either causing the divorce or driving the father away. Those children most profoundly hurt or made anxious by the loss of the father tended to be those most enraged at their mother. Anger was expressed directly in several instances.

Soon after his father departed, Don's behavior began to mirror the father's abusive treatment of the mother. In addition to his demanding and degrading remarks, Don began to compile an angry list of complaints about his mother, presented it to the father weekly, and then enjoyed father's ensuing tirades at mother.

More often, anger was expressed in displacements, such as teachers, friends, or siblings, or in regressive outbursts reminiscent of pre-school temper tantrums. Certainly, for some of the boys, the anger acted as a defense and pro-

tection against regressive oedipal fantasies, particularly where the boys were only-children or the eldest sibling.

Fears of antagonizing the mother. More common than anger, however, were fears of antagonizing the mother in whose custody the children were left, combined with fantasies of the powerful mother. This fear was, for some a central preoccupation and, in part, had a reality basis. In this group, nearly three-quarters of the mothers had initiated the decision to divorce, thereby precipitating the departure of the fathers. Many mothers were very angry, and these early latency children showed a rather practical grasp of reality in being concerned about incurring the mother's wrath. Over and beyond this reality judgment was the children's perception of the mother as a dangerous and powerful figure who had to be appeased. Because the mother was regarded by some as the victor who had driven out the father, these children worried about their own security.

Unlike the adolescents with some psychological independence from their parent, these young children did not feel safe in challenging the custodial parent's position, even if they disagreed. Further, alignments with an angry mother that identified father as unreliable and unloving were made out of deference to mother's anger, but with considerable inner conflict. This style of coping with the angry mother is in contrast to the children in late latency.

Tim, eight years old, had been told repeatedly by his mother, "Your father left us . . . he rejected *all* of us." At first, Tim shared this with the therapist with angry conviction, but, under the impact of an empathic therapist, was not able to maintain the belief in father's badness, betraying his confusion and conflict poignantly during the sessions.

Conflicts in Loyalty

Children in latency, like adolescents, experience much conflict in their feelings toward their divorcing parents. Unlike pre-school children, these boys and girls were of sufficient age to be enlisted actively by one or both parents in the waging of hostile confrontations. In most of the divorces in this age group, there was considerable turmoil, bitterness, and self-righteous accusations from which the children were not shielded. One quarter of these children felt specific pressure from their angry, humiliated mothers to hate and reject their fathers. Tugs and pulls for loyalty caused some children to feel that they were being physically torn. Unlike the older latency children, the children in this group seemed not to have any adaptive solutions for avoiding the pain.

Robert described his parents' divorce by saying, "It's splitting me in two." To emphasize his dilemma, Robert drew his hand hatchet-style down the middle of his forehead.

Such divided loyalties existed even when parents were not pushing their child for alignment or rejection.

But where parental pressures prevailed, children in early latency seemed unable to comply with the demand that they reject one parent totally and align solely with the other. In this regard they differed from the older children, who seemed capable of avoiding the anguish of conflicting pulls by forming such alignments. These younger children retained their loyalty to both parents, frequently in secret, and often at considerable psychic cost. We can infer that their need to hold on to both parents, despite the pain involved, may be related to the recent resolution of oedipal

conflicts, and their fear of the regressive pull of the alignment with one parent.

Reactions in the School Setting

There was no straightforward relationship between the intensity of the child's suffering at home and an observable reaction to the divorce as seen at school. In more than half of the younger children, teachers noted a response or change in behavior sufficiently striking to be reported to our interviewer. In some cases, the child's school behavior mirrored those behaviors observed elsewhere.

Bill's teacher reported that, since the separation, Bill seemed frightened and prone to outbursts of crying. After a noticeable decline in his ability to control his behavior, the teacher sent an inquiring note home, but Bill was too fearful to give it to his mother. At home, Bill was moody, irritable, and forlorn at the loss of his father.

But for some, there was no particular consistency in their behavior in different settings.

John was described at school as the "top of his class, an entirely delightful child." At home, John's anger spilled out in temper tantrums, obscene notes, and frequent dinner table scenes.

For John, school provided a continuing source of gratification, felt by him to have disappeared at home, and enabled him to maintain his excellent school functioning.

Becky lost complete interest in school. She would eat up her lunch by ten in the morning, then cry or beg her classmates for food and various other possessions at lunchtime. The entire school year was described by her teacher as "a complete disaster." With the therapist, Becky talked of reincarnation, wishing to come back as someone else, "So I won't have to hear my parents fighting over me." Becky's parents were locked in a frightening battle for

her custody, and Becky was unable to cope with the drain on her resources.

THE COURSE OF THE INITIAL RESPONSES

By the follow-up a year later, the children's responses to their parents' divorce had been modified. The intense pain and suffering experienced initially had disappeared; in its place was a sad, resigned attitude about the divorce. Many of the children harbored wishes that the divorce had not occurred, but such wishes were no longer the primary focus of their concern. By and large, children in this age group reluctantly accepted the divorce as final. This realistic acceptance is in contrast to our observations of the five- and six-year-old girls, who continued to cling to fantasies of the father's return.

Mary, nine years old at follow-up, said, "Divorce is better for my parents, but not for me. . . . If my father could visit more often, I probably wouldn't mind so much." But Mary added, "He doesn't like to keep regular schedules." Asked what she might tell a child whose parents were getting a divorce, Mary said she couldn't say, "Don't worry, you'll be a lot happier," because that wouldn't be true."

Her response reflected the sad but somewhat premature wisdom of many of these children at follow-up, as they shared a realistic view of their world as more difficult and lacking in sufficient gratification.

Reconciliation wishes. Strong wishes for the parents' reconciliation persisted in a third of the boys, most often in the context of continued wishes for more contact with the father.

Dan sadly shared the conviction, at follow-up, that both he and his mother wished she was still married to his dad. Dan told the therapist of his favorite fantasy, one in which he had invested considerable energy. Dan wanted to

"fix up Hazel and Pine Streets. They're all filled with mud and they don't join, but a long time ago they did. I'd like to cut the two streets so they join. But this will be a long time off," Dan sighed.

Dan's clear desire for his parents' reconciliation expressed as well the wish to repair and make whole the fragments of his torn self.

Where such reconciliation fantasies persisted, the fantasy was either being kept alive by the openly expressed wishes of a parent, or the parent-child relationship had deteriorated to such an extent that the child perceived reconciliation as his only hope. In part, the persisting fantasies served the function of prolonged denial, but reflected as well a wistful remembrance of things past and a disguised wish for a changed future.

When conflict continued. In those cases where the parents continued to fight, and turmoil persisted by the time of follow-up, the children felt increasingly angry and cheated.

"They said it was going to be better, but it isn't! It's worse!" Asked how he felt about his parents' divorce, an eight-year-old said, "It was the right thing to do. I don't mind anymore. I don't care," he added angrily. "It's made, and I just want it to be final . . . they fight every day. It makes me mad that they fight!"

Some children perceived their parents' behavior as childish, and conveyed to the therapists a sense of decreased trust in adults.

Relationship to the father. In this group of younger latency children, strong loyalty to the father persisted over the year, particularly among the boys. For some, this loyalty remained despite, or perhaps because of, constant derogation of the father by angry mothers. Most of the boys continued to

press for more frequent visits with their fathers, including those seeing their fathers once or twice weekly. In some instances, fathers were openly rejecting, yet their children continued to sustain the appearance and fantasy of a satisfying relationship.

The tenacity characteristic of this group was in contrast to children in older latency and adolescence, who responded more often to ungratifying or rejecting fathers by becoming angry and rejecting the fathers themselves. Open anger toward the father was still not characteristic for the younger latency children, despite, for some, an increased capacity to express more anger toward their mothers.

Only two children had stopped visiting their fathers of their own accord, without evidence of anger. In each case, their mother had remarried and the new step-parent was providing unaccustomed gratifications to these children who, in response, transferred their allegiance and affection to the new father.

Loyalty conflicts. Open and troublesome conflicts in loyalty toward parents was less an issue by follow-up, even for those children whose parent continued to press for allegiance. They appeared less frightened by such pressure, coping now by increasing the psychological distance between themselves and the parent making the demands for allegiance. For some, the increased distance was accompanied by pleasure and enhanced self-esteem for having mastered a difficult situation.

CONCLUSIONS

The parental separation and divorce set in motion for children in early latency a wide spectrum of responses, which over the course of the first year

diminish in intensity. Despite the resilience demonstrated by many of these children, and their efforts to deal realistically with the changed family structure, it seems evident that many still struggle at the one-year mark with the task of integrating divorce-related changes in their lives.

In this sample of 26 children in early latency, 50% had either improved in their overall level of psychological functioning, or had maintained their previous developmental strides. Fifteen percent had consolidated the difficulties we had seen initially. Another 23% of this sample was judged by us to be in significantly worsened or deteriorated psychological condition by the time of follow-up, in comparison to their level of functioning as assessed at the time of the initial counseling. Twelve percent ($N = 3$) of the children in this group were not seen at follow-up. Although the sample is small, and there is no comparable clinical study which admits of comparison, these findings are not encouraging if extrapolated to the large numbers of children experiencing divorce.

Because this study of the impact of divorce on children is still in process, findings regarding the psychological condition of the children at the first year follow-up will be re-evaluated in the light of data collected four years after the parental separation and reported more fully in the future. In general, these outcomes at the end of one year are related to the nature of the post-divorce family structure, including the amount of sustained disequilibrium, the changing tensions and gratifications of the parent-child relationships, and the interaction over time of these factors with the child's developmental needs

and personality structure. The intensity or spread of the child's initial responses was not correlated with eventual outcome, nor was the ambience of the initial separation period.

The divorce *event* is not the central factor in determining the outcome for the child, but rather, the divorce *process* or chain of events set in motion by the separation. The assimilation of divorce-related changes for children and parents is, for many, a process lasting several years, and it is necessary to follow these children during this period to capture more fully the developmental consequences of the family disruption.

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THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL DIVORCE:
Experiences of the Child in Later Latency

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THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL DIVORCE: Experiences of the Child in Later Latency

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This paper discusses the impact of divorce on 31 children in later latency, as observed shortly after the initial parental separation and one year later. The material is part of an on-going clinical study, begun in 1970, of 131 children and adolescents from 60 divorcing families in Northern California.

The child of latency age has somehow managed to escape the intensive psychological scrutiny with which his younger and older siblings have been regarded. Although no one has disputed the central significance of latency, which Erikson³ has characterized as "socially, a most decisive stage," much less is known or conceptualized regarding parent-child relationships during these middle years than of those developmental years which immediately precede or follow them. Moreover, relatively little attention has been devoted to the varying effects of disrupted or fixated development during latency. Although many school-age children come into therapy, the central focus is usually on

failure to resolve conflicts that stem from earlier developmental periods. Nor do we tend to learn much about latency from the treatment of adults; there is a relative unavailability of transferences and reconstructions pertaining to these years in most adult analyses. Bornstein² attributed the fact that "One learns relatively little about latency from the analysis of adults" to the distorted and idealized memories of adult patients who recall "the ideal of latency," namely, the successful warding-off of instinctual impulses during this time.

It is commonly agreed that the confluence of developmental and social forces propel the school-age child outward and away from the family towards

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peer relationships and new adult figures. Clinicians have stressed ^{1, 2, 5, 6, 8} the special importance of assuring developmental continuity during these years. Bornstein ² specifically cautioned against environmental interruptions, referring to the importance of "free energies needed for character development," and observing that the latency child "fears nothing more than the upsetting of his precarious equilibrium." Erikson, ^{3, 4} in addressing the fundamental tasks of this period, called attention to the lasting consequences of partial or total failure to successfully master these at their appropriate times. And Sarnoff, ⁸ more recently, referring to the fragility of the newly-consolidated latency defenses, warned that the drives in latency "may be stirred into activity at any time by seduction or sympathetic stimulation."

It is within this context, stressing the overriding importance of developmental continuity during this life phase, that our understanding of the impact of parental divorce upon the child must be set. For divorce necessarily affects the freedom of the child to keep major attention riveted outside the family circle. Moreover, the decision to divorce frequently ushers in an extended several year period marked by uncertainty and sharp discontinuity which has the potential to move the psychological and social functioning of the latency child into profound disequilibrium and painfully altered parent-child relationships. Alternatively, these changes can bear the potential for promoting development and maturation, as well as the possibility of more gratifying relationships within the post-divorce family structure.

Our data for this paper are drawn from the sample already described, ⁷ of 57 latency aged children from 47 fam-

ilies, here focused on the experiences of the 31 children from 28 families who were between nine and ten years old at the time that they were initially seen by us. As elaborated elsewhere, ^{7, 9, 10} these 31 children from 28 families represent part of a cohort of 131 children from 60 divorcing families referred for anticipatory guidance and planning for their children around the separation, and then seen by us again approximately a year later for the first of two planned follow-up studies.

THE INITIAL RESPONSES

How They Looked When They Came

Many of these children had presence, poise, and courage when they came to their initial interviews. They perceived the realities of their families' disruption and the parental turbulence with a soberness and clarity which we at first found startling, particularly when compared with the younger children who so frequently appeared disorganized and immobilized by their worry and grief. These youngsters were, by contrast, actively struggling to master a host of intense conflicting feelings and fears and trying to give coherence and continuity to the baffling disorder which they now experienced in their lives.

Robert said, "I have to calm myself down. Everything is happening too fast."

Katherine told us that a long time ago, when she was little, she thought everything was fine, that her parents really loved each other, and that, "Nothing would happen to them until they got real, real old." She added with the fine perceptions of a latency age child, "Mom and Dad married 12½ years ago. They met 17½ years ago. I always thought love would last if they stayed together that long."

Some children came prepared with an agenda.

Anna, after a few general comments from the interviewer, designed to put her at ease, interrupted with a brisk, "Down to business," and went on immediately to describe the diffuse feelings of anxiety with which she suffered these days and which made her feel "sick to her stomach."

Mary volunteered that she was "so glad" her mother brought her to talk about the divorce because, "If I don't talk about it soon I'll fall apart."

For others the opportunity to be with a concerned adult had considerable significance seemingly unrelated to specific content. Some of these children tried in many ways to continue the relationship.

Janet begged to return the following week. She offered, "I like to talk about my troubles," and drew a heart on the blackboard, writing under it, "I like Miss X."

Mary tried to extend her interview time, saying that her mother had not yet returned to fetch her, and then confessing that she had just lied.

Still others among these children found these interviews threatening and painful, and barely kept their anxiety controlled by keeping themselves or their extremities in continual motion, the rhythm of which motion correlated with the subject discussed.

Thus, legs moved much faster when Daddy was mentioned to Jim, who was bravely trying to maintain his calm and referred with some disdain to "Mother's divorce problem," adding, "I wonder who she's got now?"

Others maintained their composure by denial and distancing.

Jack stated, "I keep my cool. It's difficult to know what I'm thinking."

David said darkly, "I don't try to think about it."

The Layering of Response

These various efforts to manage—by seeking coherence, by denial, by cour-

age, by bravado, by seeking support from others, by keeping in motion, by conscious avoidance—all emerged as age-available ways of coping with the profound underlying feelings of loss and rejection, of helplessness and loneliness that pervaded these children and that, in most of them, only gradually became visible within the context of the several successive interviews. Actually, testament to the resourcefulness of so many of these children is just this capacity to function simultaneously on these two widely discrepant levels, not always discernible to the outside observer. At times, only information from collateral sources revealed their simultaneous involvement in the mastery efforts of the coping stance and the succumbing to the anguish of their psychic pain. This at times conscious layering of psychological functioning is a specific finding in this age group. It is profoundly useful in muting and encapsulating the suffering, making it tolerable and enabling the child to move developmentally. But it does not overcome the hurt, which is still there and takes its toll.

After his father left the home, Bob sat for many hours sobbing in his darkened room. The father visited infrequently. When seen by our project, Bob offered smilingly, "I have a grand time on his visits," and added unsolicited and cheerily, "I see him enough." Only later would he shamefacedly admit that he missed his father intensely and longed to see him daily.

A few children were able to express their suffering more directly to their parents, as well as to us. This is the more poignant if one bears in mind Bornstein's² admonition that the latency child is normally engaged developmentally in a powerful battle against painful feelings.

Jane's father left his wife angrily after discovering her infidelity, and ceased visiting the children. He moved in with a woman who had children approximately the age of his own children. Jane cried on the telephone in speaking with her father "I want to see you. I want to see you. I miss you. Alice (referring to the child of the other woman) sees you every day. We only see you once a month. That's not enough."

A very few children succumbed more totally and regressively.

Paul responded to his father's departure by lying curled up sobbing inside a closet. He alternated this behavior, which lasted intermittently for several weeks, with telephone calls to his father, imploring him to return.

The suffering of these children was governed not only by the immediate pain of the family rupture, but expressed as well their grief over the loss of the family structure they had until then known, as well as their fears for the uncertain future that lay ahead for their newly-diminished family. In a sense, as compared with younger children, their more sophisticated and mature grasp of time and reality and history increased their comprehension of the meanings and consequences of divorce—while enabling some of them better to temper the impact.

Jim, when told by his parents of the plan to divorce, cried, "Why did you have to wait until we were so old?"

Finally, efforts to master inner distress were conjoined at times with efforts to conceal from the outside observer because of an acute sense of shame. Feelings of shame did not appear in the younger children in our study, but emerged specifically with this age group. These children were ashamed of the divorce and disruption in their family, despite their awareness of the common-

ness of divorce; they were ashamed of their parents and their behaviors, and they lied loyally to cover these up; and they were ashamed of the implied rejection of themselves in the father's departure, marking them, in their own eyes, as unlovable. Out of such a complex combination of wish to save face and loyalty to parents, some children lied bravely.

Jesse proudly told us that his physician father had insisted that all of his shots be in his left arm in order to protect his pitching arm. Actually, the father had evinced no interest whatsoever in Jesse's athletic career.

Attempted Mastery by Activity and by Play

Unlike the younger latency children, so many of whom were immobilized by the family disruption, the pain which the children in this age group suffered often galvanized them into organized activity. This was usually a multidetermined response geared to overcome their sense of powerlessness in the face of the divorce, to overcome their humiliation at the rejection which they experienced, and to actively—and as energetically as possible—reverse the passively suffered family disruption. In some, this was a direct effort to undo the parental separation.

Marian, with considerable encouragement at long distance from the paternal grandfather, embarked on a frenzied sequence of activities designed to intimidate her mother and force her to return to the marriage. Marian scolded, yelled, demanded, and berated her mother, often making it impossible for her mother to have dates, and indeed almost succeeding in reversing the divorce decision by mobilizing all her mother's guilt in relation to herself and the other children. In one such episode, the child screamed in anger for several hours and then came quietly and tearfully to her

mother, saying softly, "Mom, I'm so unhappy," confessing that she felt "all alone in the world." Following this, the harassment ceased.

Several children in this older latency group energetically developed a variety of new, exciting, and intrinsically pleasurable mastery activities which combined play action with reality adaptation. Many of these activities required not only fantasy production but the enterprise, organization, and skill of the later latency child.

Ann, whose father was a successful advertising and public relations man, designed and issued a magazine with articles and drawings, announcing the impending divorce of her parents, together with other interesting happenings, which she distributed and sold in her school and community.

In her role identification with her public media father, Ann not only overcame the loss of his ongoing presence, at the very same time, through her newspaper publication, she proclaimed her acceptance of the reality of this loss. But central to this maneuver is the psychic gratification in it—Ann transformed pain into the pleasure of achievement, and recaptured the center stage of interest.

Bill, for his part, spent many after school hours following the divorce in the office of his cold and disinterested father, answering the telephone, playing out the role of executive, and calling his mother regularly to tell her that he was having a grand time.

Elizabeth and her younger siblings found a seagull on the beach on the weekend following the parental separation and announcement of divorce. They spent several hours that day digging a grave, making a cross, marking the grave, and soberly writing the history of their activity on the plaque. One may presume that they were providing not only the seagull but also their pre-divorce family with a somber and appropriate funeral.

Anger

The single feeling that most clearly distinguished this group from all the younger children was their conscious intense anger. It had many sources, but clearly a major determinant was its role in temporarily obliterating or at least obscuring the other even more painful affective responses we have described. Although we have reported elsewhere¹⁰ a rise in aggression and irritability in the pre-school child following parental separation, the anger experienced by these older latency children was different in being both well organized and clearly object-directed; indeed, their capacity directly to articulate this anger was striking.

John volunteered that most of the families of the kids on his block were getting a divorce. When asked how the children felt, he said, "They're so angry they're almost going crazy."

Approximately half of the children in this group were angry at their mothers, the other half at their fathers, and a goodly number were angry at both. Many of the children were angry at the parent whom they thought initiated the divorce, and their perception of this was usually accurate.

Amy said she was angry at Mom for kicking Dad out and ruining their lives. "She's acting just like a college student, at age 31—dancing and dating and having to be with her friends."

Ben accused his mother, saying, "You told me it would be better after the divorce, and it isn't."

One adopted child screamed at his mother, "If you knew you were going to divorce, why did you adopt us?"

Interestingly, despite detailed and often very personal knowledge of the serious causes underlying the divorce decision,

including repeated scenes of violence between the parents, most of these children were unable at the time of the initial counseling to see any justification for the parental decision to divorce. (By follow-up, many had come more soberly to terms with this.) Although one father had held his wife on the floor and put bobbie pins in her nose while their two children cried and begged him to stop, both children initially strongly opposed the mother's decision to divorce.

For some, anger against the parents was wedded to a sense of moral indignation and outrage that the parent who had been correcting their conduct was behaving in what they considered to be an immoral and irresponsible fashion.

Mark said that "three days before my dad left he was telling me all these things about 'be good.' That hurt the most," he said, to think that his father did that and knew he was going to leave all the time.

This kind of moral stance in judgment upon parents is reminiscent of the attitudes we found frequently in the adolescent group,⁹ but not in the younger groups.

The intense anger of these children was variously expressed. Parents reported a rise in temper tantrums, in scolding, in diffuse demandingness, and in dictatorial attitudes. Sometimes the anger was expressed in organized crescendos to provide a calculated nuisance when the mother's dates arrived.

Shortly after the divorce, Joe's abusive, erratic, and rejecting father disappeared, leaving no address. The mother reported that now she had to ask the boy for permission to go out on dates, was reproached by him if she drank, and had her telephone calls monitored by him; when she bought something for her-

self, he screamingly demanded that the same amount of money be spent on him. Joe used his sessions with us primarily to express his anger at his mother for not purchasing a gun for him.

Adding to the dictatorial posturings and swaggering expressions that these children enjoyed playing out following the departure of their fathers was the fact that, in many of these households, the father had carried responsibility for a harsh and frightening discipline. His departure thus signaled a new freedom to express impulses that had been carefully held in check during his presence, a freedom to do so with impunity and with pleasure.

Mary said that she was scared of her father. He had always required that things be spic and span around the house. "In that way I'm glad he's gone," she said.

Many mothers were immobilized by their own conflicts, as well as by their unfamiliarity with the role of disciplinarian. Others indicated in covert ways that they fully expected that one of the children would assume the father's role within the family. For some of these children the taking on of such an aggressive stance clearly reflected an identification with the attributes of the departed father, and thus an undoing of the pain of his departure.

Anne congratulated her mother warmly on her decision to divorce her tyrannical husband. Shortly thereafter, however, Anne herself began to act out a commanding and screaming role vis-a-vis her mother and the younger children. This culminated in a dramatic episode of screaming for many hours when an uncle attempted to curb her wild behavior. She became very frightened after this, offering that all men were untrustworthy and that nobody would ever love her again.

Other children showed the obverse of

all this—namely, an increased compliance and decreased assertiveness following the divorce.

Janet's behavior shifted in the direction of becoming mother's helper and shadow, and showing unquestioning obedience to her mother's orders. She became known throughout the neighborhood as an excellent and reliable baby-sitter despite her very young age (nine years). She was, however, not able to say anything even mildly critical of her rejecting father, and was one of the few children who openly blamed herself for the divorce. When initially seen by us, she was preoccupied with her feelings of inadequacy and her low self-esteem.

Fears And Phobias

Unlike the pre-school children and the younger latency group, the children of this sample were not worried about actual starvation, and references to hunger in response to the parental separation were rare. Their fears, however, were nonetheless pervasive. Some, while not entirely realistic, were still tied to reality considerations; others approached phobic proportions. In fact, among this group it was often difficult for us to separate out the reality bases, including their sensitivity to the unspoken wishes of their parents, from the phobic elaboration. Thus, approximately one-quarter of these children were worried about being forgotten or abandoned by both parents.

John, in tears, said that his mother had left him at the doctor's office and didn't return on time. He cried, "She said that she was doing errands, but I know she was with her boyfriend."

Martha said to her mother, "If you don't love Daddy, maybe I'm next."

Some of their responses related to their

accurate perception of parental feelings that children represent an unwelcome burden at this time in their lives.

Peggy reported that her mother had said to her, "If you're not good I'm going to leave." Although Peggy knew that her mother had said this in anger, she still worried about it.

Ann opined, "If Daddy marries Mrs. S., she has two daughters of her own, and I'll be Cinderella."

Some expressed the not wholly unrealistic concern that reliance on one rather than two parents was considerably less secure, and therefore the child's position in the world had become more vulnerable.

Katherine told us, "If my mother smokes and gets cancer, where would I live?" She repeatedly begged her mother to stop smoking, and worried intensely whenever her mother was late in arriving home.

Some worried, not unrealistically, about emotionally ill parents.

Ann stated about her mother, "I love her very much, but I have feelings. I'm afraid when Mom takes a long time to come home. She once tried to commit suicide. One day she ate a whole bottle of pills. I think of someone dying . . . how I'll be when I'm alone. Mom tried to commit suicide because of my father. It wasn't until after the divorce that she stopped crying. I think of her jumping over the Golden Gate Bridge. Mom thinks no one worries about her, but I do."

Many of these children experienced the additional concern that their specific needs were likely to be overlooked or forgotten.

Wendy referred several times through her interviews to the fact that her mother insisted on buying Fig Newtons, when she perfectly well knew that Wendy hated them.

Responsibility For The Divorce

Only a few children expressed concern about having caused the divorce, although we endeavored in a variety of ways, including direct observations, play, and drawings, to elicit such material. We may, perhaps, cautiously infer from the fact that their occasional stealing occurred in situations where the child was assured of being caught, that there may exist some need for punishment relating to guilty fantasies. However, our direct evidence on this issue was limited to a few children in this later latency group, and appeared only in those children who showed a variety of other symptomatic behaviors in addition to the guilty thinking.

Lorraine, whose petty pilfering and lying and school difficulties were greatly exacerbated with the parental separation, said, "Whenever I think something is going to happen, it goes and happens. Like the time I thought my great-aunt was going to die, and then she died. And like the time I thought there was going to be a divorce." She wished that she could grow up and become a good witch, like Samantha.

Shaken Sense Of Identity

Many of these children experienced a sense of a shaken world in which the usual indicators had changed place or disappeared. For several children, these changed markers were particularly related to their sense of who they were and who they would become in the future. Critical to this new sense of stress is that during latency years the child's normal conception of his own identity is closely tied to the external family structure and developmentally dependent on the physical presence of parental figures—not only for nurture, protection, and control, but also for the con-

solidation of age appropriate identifications.^{3,7} Specifically, the self image and identity which in latency is still organized around, "I am the son of John and Mary Smith," is profoundly shaken by the severance of the parental relationship. Some children expressed this confusion and sense of ruptured identity with anxious questions, comparing physical characteristics of their parents and themselves, as if trying in this manner to reassemble the broken pieces into a whole.

Jack, unsolicited, volunteered a long discussion of his physical features. "My eyes change colors, just like my Mom's. My hair is going to change to light brown, just like my Dad's. Other people say I'm like my Dad. My Dad says I'm like my Mom. I say I'm like a combination."

Another aspect of this threat to the integrity of self which occurs at the time of divorce is posed more specifically to the socialization process and superego formation. The child feels that his conscience controls have been weakened by the family disruption, as the external supports give way and his anger at the parents moves strongly into consciousness. One manifestation of this may be new behaviors of petty stealing and lying which make their appearance in this age group around the time of family disruption. The threat the child perceives to his sense of being socialized is related, as well, to his concern of having to take care of himself; it was conveyed to us by Bob's moving story of his two rabbits.

Bob volunteered, "I think I want to talk to you today." He told about the two little rabbits he had bought several years ago and cared for in an elaborate high-rise hutch he had carefully constructed. One day, despite his protective watchfulness, vicious neighborhood dogs ripped the cage apart, and the rab-

bits disappeared or were dragged off. The two rabbits, whom he had named Ragged Ear and Grey Face, may have escaped, he thinks, because recently he came upon two rabbits playing in the woods. They were wild rabbits now, but they resembled the two he had lost.

The two rabbits of this rich fantasy may well have referred to the child and his brother, and his story may reflect his fear of the primitiveangers (the vicious dogs) let loose at the time of divorce, his fear that he would be destroyed, and the projected rescue solution—via return to a presocialized wild state in which the child-equals-rabbit takes responsibility for his own care. Clearly, the little wild rabbits who survived had a different identity and a different superego formation than the rabbits who were cared for so lovingly in the elaborately built hutch.

Loneliness And Loyalty Conflicts

Children in this older latency group described their loneliness, their sense of having been left outside, and their sad recognition of their powerlessness and peripheral role in major family decisions.

Betty said, "We were sitting in the dark with candles. Then they (her parents) told us suddenly about the divorce. We didn't have any thing to say, and so then we watched TV."

These feelings of loneliness, not observed in this way in the younger age groups, reflect not only the greater maturational achievement of these children but also their more grown-up expectation of mutuality, as well as reciprocal support, in their relationships with parents and other adults. They thus felt more hurt, humiliated, and pushed aside by the events visited upon them, over which they had so little leverage.

It should be noted that these children,

in their wrestling with this loneliness, realistically perceived the very real parental withdrawal of interest in children which so often occurs at the time of divorce. In addition to the departure of one parent, both parents understandably at such times become preoccupied with their own needs; their emotional availability, their attention span, and even the time spent with the children are often sharply reduced. Moreover, the families in our study were, by and large, nuclear families, unconnected to wider extended families or support systems of any enduring significance to the children. In this sense the children's feelings of loneliness and of loss reflected their realization that the central connecting structures they had known were dissolving.

Perhaps, however, the central ingredient in the loneliness and sense of isolation these children reported was related to their perception of the divorce as a battle between the parents, in which the child is called upon to take sides.⁷ By this logic, a step in the direction of the one parent was experienced by the child (and, of course, sometimes by the parent) as a betrayal of the other parent, likely to evoke real anger and further rejection, in addition to the intrapsychic conflicts mobilized. Thus, paralyzed by their own conflicting loyalties and the severe psychic or real penalties which attach to choice, many children refrained from choice and felt alone and desolate, with no place to turn for comfort or parenting. In a true sense, their conflict placed them in a solitary position at midpoint in the marital struggle.

Somatic Symptoms

Finally, one symptomatic response observed in this group, and not seen in

any younger group, was the report of a variety of somatic symptoms of different kinds and degrees of severity, such as headaches and stomach aches, which the children related to the parental conflict and parental visits.

Martha refused to visit her father, saying that after she visited him she returned with terrible headaches which lasted several hours.

Bobby had cramps in his legs, which he said were only relieved when his father massaged them.

Two of the children in this group who suffered with chronic asthma experienced intensified attacks, occurring more frequently.

Jack reported that, during his visits with his father, his asthma increased markedly; he added quickly, "My dad has nothing to do with my asthma."

CHANGES IN SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Since learning is a central developmental task of latency, it is important to note that, exactly comparable to our figures with the younger latency children, half of the 31 children in this older latency cohort also suffered a noticeable decline in school performance. Unlike the younger latency children,⁷ a concomitant deterioration in their peer relationships occurred in this group during and following the parental separation. There was no discernible correlation between prior school performance and the subsequent drop in school achievement, or between the degree of behavioral distress in the home setting and the falling-off in learning. Only one child showed considerable school improvement following the parental separation. This was in a divorce that involved the separation of the mother (and the children) from a seriously ill, manic-depressive husband.

The behavior of many of the children at school was at considerable variance with that displayed at home. Thus, some children who were feeling pressed and frightened at home began to act out a bossy, controlling, sometimes devious role at school.

Kay, a gentle girl at home, frightened about the loss of her mother and openly heartbroken by her real rejection by her father, was described by her teachers as a girl who "needs to be queen of the hill," and as "devious, lying, whining, pitting children against each other." Her school work slipped badly as these new social behaviors emerged.

Another school behavior pattern which emerged at the time of separation combined a decreased ability to concentrate in class with increased aggression on the playground.

Some children found the pressure of academic and social expectations at the time of divorce turmoil almost unbearable.

Jeff, a sober and mild mannered child whose parents were fighting angrily over custody of the children, on receiving an incomplete on his school paper, spurted out of class and ran pell mell across a nearby field, screaming all the way, "I won't do it."

Some children used the school to express what they could not say at home.

Elsie wrote a composition about a drunken man and his girlfriends, which had clear references to her father's behavior.

We have not been able thus far to distinguish the characteristics of those children who showed change in their school adjustment from those who showed no change at all. All but four of the 15 children whose learning declined at the time of the parental separation had resumed their previous educational and social achievement levels by the time of the one-year follow-up.

CHANGES IN PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

We turn now to a necessarily abbreviated discussion of some of the new parent-child configurations that emerged as a response to the marital strife and parental separation. These changed relationships constitute a significant component of the total response of children in this age group. The divorce-triggered changes in the parent-child relationship may propel the child forward into a variety of precocious, adolescent, or, more accurately, pseudoadolescent behaviors. They can, on the other hand, catalyze the development of true empathic responsiveness and increased responsibility in the child. And they can also result, as in the case of alignment with one parent against the other, in a lessening of the age-appropriate distance between parent and child and a retreat by the child along the individuation-separation axis of development.

Alignment

One of the attributes of the parent-child relationship at this particular age is the peculiar interdependence of parent and child, which can become enhanced at the time of the divorce, and which accords the child a significant role in restoring or further diminishing the self-esteem of the parent. Thus the child in late latency, by his attitude, his stance, and his behavior has independent power to hurt, to reject, to confront, to forgive, to comfort, and to affirm. He also has the capacity to be an unswervingly loyal friend, ally, and "team member," exceeding in reliability his sometimes more fickle and capricious adolescent sibling.

Among the 31 children in this cohort, eight (or 26%) formed a relationship

with one parent following the separation which was specifically aimed at the exclusion or active rejection of the other. These alignments were usually initiated and always fueled by the embattled parent, most often by the parent who felt aggrieved, deserted, exploited, or betrayed by the divorcing spouse. The angers which the parent and the child shared soon became the basis for complexly organized strategies aimed at hurting and harassing the former spouse, sometimes with the intent of shaming him or her into returning to the marriage. More often the aim was vengeance. For many of these parents, these anger-driven campaigns served additionally to ward off depressions, and their intensity remained undiminished for a long time following parental separation. It should be noted that none of these children who participated, many of them as ingenious and mischievous allies, had previously rejected the parent who, subsequent to the alignment, became the target of their angers. Therefore, their provocative behavior was extremely painful and their rejection bewildering and humiliating to the excluded parent.

Our data indicate that, although the fight for allegiance may be initiated by the embattled parent, these alignments strike a responsive chord in the children within this specific age group. In fact, it is our suggestion that for children in late latency, the alignment with one parent against the other represents a highly complexly organized, over-determined, ego-syntonic coping behavior, which serves a diversity of psychological needs and keeps at bay a number of significant intrapsychic conflicts and their attendant anxieties. A central part of the dynamic of this behavior is the splitting of the ambivalent relationship to the parents

into that with the good parent and the bad parent. Moreover, in our findings, these alignments have the hurtful potential for consolidation and perpetuation long past the initial post-separation period, especially in those families where the child is aligned with the custodial parent.

Paul's father was referred to us informally by the court to which the father had gone to complain of his wife's vindictive blocking of his visits with his three children. The father, a successful chemical engineer, expressed sadness and longing for his children, and concern that his children were being systematically turned against him by their mother's unremitting attacks and falsehoods. For example, the children were told by the mother that they had to give up their dog because the father was refusing to purchase food for it, although at that time the family was receiving well over \$16,000 a year in support. Paul's mother expressed astonishment and bitterness at his father for the unilateral divorce decision, describing her many years of devoted love and hard work to support the father's graduate education. She coldly insisted that, as a devout Christian woman, she would never harbor anger. Yet she was convinced that, since the father had rejected both her and their three children, Paul would "never forgive his father, nor forget."

Paul's initial response to the parental separation was his regression to sobbing in a dark closet, which we have earlier described, alternating with telephone pleas to his father to return. Later, in recalling this time, the child said to us, "I felt that I was being torn into two pieces." By the time we saw Paul, several months following the separation, he had consolidated an unshakable alignment with his mother. He extolled her as small and powerful, possessed of ESP, and knowledgeable in six languages. Of his father, he stated, "He'll never find another family like us." He volunteered that he never wanted to visit his father—ever. In response to our efforts to elicit fantasy material, he said that he would like best to live on a desert island with his mother and siblings and have a very, very long telephone cord for speaking with his

father, and maybe a speedboat for visiting him.

Among Paul's activities during the year following our initial contact was his continuing reporting to his mother, and eventually to her attorney, about his father's "lurid" social life and presumed delinquencies, and his continued rejections of his father's increasingly desperate overtures, including gifts and wishes to maintain visitation. Paul also maintained a coercive control over his younger sisters, who were eager to see their father, and he made sure by his monitoring of them that they would not respond with affection in his presence. At follow-up he told us, "We are a team now. We used to have an extra guy, and he broke us up into little pieces." His anger and his mother's anger seemed undiminished at this time.

Empathy

Heightened empathic response to one or both distressed parents—and siblings—was catalyzed in several children as a specific consequence of the separation and the ensuing divorce.

With unusual insight, Anne described this process in *status nascendi*. She said, "I know that my mother isn't ready for the divorce, because I can put myself in her place. I can think just like I think my mother thinks."

Some youngsters were able to perceive their parents' needs with great sensitivity, and to respond with compassion and caring.

Mary told us, "My mom cried. She was so tired of being so strong for the children, and she asked us to sleep with her." Mary and her brother complied. "It made Mom feel better. Then we got up in the morning and made her breakfast in bed. Sometimes we just tell her, 'we are here, it's going to be all right.'"

We were interested to find that parents were often profoundly appreciative of this sensitivity and consideration.

Jane's mother told us that Jane was a wonderful child who wordlessly responded to the

mother's needs and feelings. "Whenever I feel alone in the evening she cuddles me," her mother said.

Some of these children, especially the little girls, worried about their fathers and were concerned about the particulars of where they were sleeping and eating.

Jane told us how much she worries about her father, that he works late, that he only has a couch to sleep on, and that he seems so "extra tired."

Sometimes the children took on responsibility for the younger children, as well as for themselves, and for important routines in the household. Many parents had no adult relationships to lean on, and they relied heavily on these children for emotional support and advice, as well as for practical help.

Sometimes empathic feelings were stimulated by unequal treatment of siblings by the departing parent.

Jack suddenly began to wheeze as he told us that his father had invited him, but not his sister, to live with him. He added that his father had sent him a Christmas card, signing it, "With all my love," but had only sent his sister a signed card. "I guess it made her feel pretty bad," he added sadly.

A few children were particularly sensitive to the changing moods and needs of their emotionally ill parent, and learned early to dissemble and protect what they understood to be the fragility of the parent's adjustment.

Jane stated as one of her problems that it was hard for her to be honest with her mother. Her mother kept asking questions about the father's relationship with his new girlfriends. She, Jane, could not tell her mother that her father and his girlfriend didn't fight, because "I'm scared that it will make her sad and cry." At follow-up, Jane solemnly told us, "Mom will probably marry, but she is not ready. She just got the divorce and wants to be settled. I think she has gone

through a lot of trouble and sadness and needs more time."

FOLLOW-UP AT ONE YEAR

A first follow-up on these youngsters took place a year after the initial consultation. By and large, as with the younger latency children, the turbulent responses to the divorce itself had mostly become muted with the passage of the intervening year. In about half the children (15 of the 29 available at follow-up) the disequilibrium created by the family disruption—the suffering; the sense of shame; the fears of being forgotten, lost, or actively abandoned; and the many intense worries associated with their new sense of vulnerability and dependence on a more fragile family structure—had almost entirely subsided. But even these children with apparent better outcomes, who seemed relatively content with their new family life and circle of friends, including step-parents, were not without backward glances of bitterness and nostalgia. In fact, the anger and hostility aroused around the divorce events lingered longer and more tenaciously than did any of the other affective responses. Of the total group, ten (or one-third) of the children maintained an unremitted anger directed at the non-custodial parent; of these, four did so in alignment with the custodial mother, the other six on their own.

Edward, who was doing splendidly in school and in new friendship relationships with his mother and with an admired male teacher, nonetheless said bitterly of his father, "I'm not going to speak to him any more. My dad is off my list now." (This was a father who, prior to the divorce, had had a very warm relationship with his son.)

Although some of these children who were doing well continued to harbor

reconciliation wishes, most had come to accept the divorce with sad finality. Some seemed to be unconsciously extrapolating from these reconciliation wishes to plan future careers as repairmen, as bridge builders, as architects, as lawyers. Others, like Jane, were perhaps extending their protective attitudes towards their disturbed parents.

Asked what she might like to do when she grows up, Jane responded, "You might laugh. A child psychiatrist. You're one, aren't you?" She talked movingly of working someday "with blind children, or mentally retarded children, or children who cannot speak."

By contrast, the other half (14 of the 29 seen at follow-up) gave evidence of consolidation into troubled and conflicted depressive behavior patterns, with, in half of these, more open distress and disturbance than at the initial visit. A significant component in this now chronic maladjustment was a continuing depression and low self-esteem, combined with frequent school and peer difficulties. One such child was described by his teacher at follow-up as, "A little old man who worries all the time and rarely laughs." In this group, symptoms that had emerged had generally persisted and even worsened. For instance, phobic reactions had in one instance worsened and spread; delinquent behavior such as truancy and petty thievery remained relatively unchanged; and some who had become isolated and withdrawn were even more so. One new behavior configuration that emerged during the first post-divorce year in these nine- and ten-year-olds was a precocious thrust into adolescent preoccupation with sexuality and assertiveness, with all the detrimental potential of such phase-inappropriate unfoldings. And amongst all the chil-

dren, both in the groups with better and with poorer outcomes, relatively few were able to maintain good relationships with both parents.

In a future report we shall present a fuller discussion of the many variables which seem to relate to this bimodal spread of outcomes for the post-divorce course of these children. Here we would like to close with the remarks of a ten-year-old sage from our study, whose words capture the salient mood of these children at the first follow-up—their clear-eyed perception of reality, their pragmatism, their courage, and their muted disappointment and sadness. In summarizing the entire scene, she said, "Knowing my parents, no one is going to change his mind. We'll just all have to get used to the situation and to them."

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*The Effects of Parental Divorce: The
Adolescent Experience*

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The Effects of Parental Divorce: The Adolescent Experience

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This essay, which discusses the effects of parental divorce upon the adolescent, is the first report from a three-year study¹ designed to observe and record the impact of divorce on children and on their families as discerned at the time of the divorce decision and again approximately one year thereafter. These research goals were combined with efforts to develop counseling models and specific techniques of psychological guidance for the participating families. Of the 131 children in our total sample, 21 were 13 years old or older at the time of the divorce decision. Although this represents a relatively small group, the findings are nonetheless notable, partly because they are at some variance with generally held conceptions regarding the response of adolescents to family disruption and partly because there have been no systematic studies reported in the literature regarding the phase-specific impact of parental divorce at this developmental period.

¹ The Children of Divorce Project was supported by a grant from the Zellerbach Family Fund of San Francisco at the Community Mental Health Center of Marin County, California. The project staff comprised Judith S. Wallerstein, M.S.W., principal investigator; Joan B. Kelly, Ph.D., co-principal investigator; Angela Homme, Ph.D.; Doris Juvinal, M.S.W.; Susannah Roy, M.S.W.; Janet West, M.S.W.

Marin County, stretching northward from San Francisco, contains some 206,000 people and is considered one of the most beautiful as well as most affluent areas in the United States. It has at the same time one of the highest marriage and divorce rates in the country and in the world.* The population is young, relatively well educated, racially nearly homogeneous, and generally vigorous. Because of these considerations it was reasoned that the phenomenon of divorce might in this milieu be more susceptible of highlighted systematic study than in settings where divorce is accompanied by high crime and poverty rates, crowding, and other disorders of urban living which contribute to the strain of family life. In effect it was hoped that a relatively stable setting would better enable the divorce themes themselves to emerge over time with greater clarity.

Accordingly, in 1970 the project reported here was begun at the Community Mental Health Center of Marin County, directed to the general divorcing population. People who had taken the decisive step of legal filing for family dissolution were advised of the availability of our free counseling service for themselves and their children. The counseling was explained as child focused, primarily preventive in nature, and including an individual evaluation of each child and counseling sessions with the parents. Help was offered to parents in interpreting the family dissolution to the children, in planning postdivorce arrangements, and in discussion with each parent of ways of easing the effects on the children. In effect we threw a wide net into the general divorce population pool, and we brought in 60 families with 131 children between the ages of 3 and 19 who were seen by five experienced clinicians trained in work with children and parents. The subjects were seen during a 6-week initial counseling period and invited to return for further follow-up interviews, again individually for each family member, at 12 to 18

* In 1970 the divorce rate in the United States was 3.5 per 1000 population, in California 4.2 per 1000, and in Marin County 5.7 per 1000. The highest divorce rate outside of the United States in 1970 was in the USSR (2.6 per 1000). In other European countries where divorce is legal, the divorce rate was considerably lower.

Between 1962 and 1972 in the United States the rate of divorce has increased 81 percent while the marriage rate has risen only 27 percent. A comparable analysis for California indicates a 96 percent increase in the divorce rate with a 26 percent rise in the marriage rate. The number of children under the age of 18 involved in divorce is also greater in California (16.6 per 1000 children in 1969) than in the United States as a whole (10.3 per 1000 children in 1969).

months postcounseling. Thus our data derives from these subjects seen initially at the height of the divorce decision or crisis, and subsequently when relationships had presumably had a chance to achieve a more stable equilibrium. A subgroup encountered serendipitously in the course of this study was those parents who, as children, had experienced the divorce of their own parents. Their revived memories and feelings provided an additional, although retrospective, source of data.

Although marital crisis and divorce have received considerable professional and community attention in the post-World War II United States, the effects of divorce on children have been very little scrutinized. At the time that this study was launched only McDermott had collected direct observations on a nonclinical population at the time of parental divorce, and his sample was limited to 22 children of nursery school age [19]. Subsequently, Hetherington reported an experimental study of the behavioral responses to male interviewers of adolescent girls who had lost their fathers through earlier divorce as compared with girls who had lost their fathers through death and girls from still intact families [13]. Hetherington found intensified seductive and somewhat maladroit behaviors in her experimental sample. In these instances the divorces also were not recent but predated the girls' adolescences. There have been some social science survey studies [5, 12, 14-16, 21] attempting through retrospective questionnaire data to establish correlations between parental divorce and certain emotional and behavioral sequences such as alteration in self-esteem regulation, dating patterns, and deviant or delinquent behavior patterns. As with Hetherington's findings the divorce in most instances had been in earlier periods. Finally there are reports of studies of court and clinical populations [18, 28] trying to ascertain common psychological or social characteristics of the divorcing families and their children, and accumulated experience and extrapolations from clinical practice [7, 23, 27]. None of these were addressed specifically to the youngster who had reached adolescence at the time of the parental divorce.

In our project we attempted to study parental divorce as an individual psychological experience to be followed over time for its impact on and consequences for each of the participants in the family drama, the children individually and in interaction across

generations with their divorcing parents. In doing so we have been guided by a number of general theoretical considerations and conceptualizations which set the framework for our study.

First we have taken for granted the complex interplay of adaptive and defensive strategies that determine each child's capacity to maneuver the divorce stress, each with his idiosyncratic distribution of areas of achieved mastery and growth alongside emotional difficulties and compromise formation. This interplay is represented by the following example. The child of divorcing parents who expresses guiltily his responsibility for having caused the divorce may indeed be doing so to ward off the more terrifying feeling that he has no control or indeed no influence whatsoever on the course of events in his environment. This particular conflict resolution with anxiety and guilt generated may actually be in the service of the most effective coping with an otherwise overwhelming situation.

Therapeutic work directed solely to the exposure and resolution of the conflict over neurotic guilt can thus concurrently undermine the most effective coping strategy available to that child at that time. Similarly, Anna Freud stressed the role of psychological regression and of denial as significant and necessary parts of normal childhood and adolescent development. Clinical judgment regarding the efficacies of these maneuvers must take into account the specific adaptive as well as defensive purposes and value of each in formulating an overall judgment regarding the child's psychic state in relation to the event or phenomenon being coped with.

A second guiding generalization was that judgments of pathology in coping could be made confidently only over time, because we have no established, understood, or agreed upon normative behavior models for effective response to the kind of life crisis represented by divorce. Do we know anything, for example, about expectable response or spectrum of response to family disruption that can differentially portend ultimate mastery or failure to master? Can the capacity to maintain development as the central criterion for mental health be assessed clinically at the time of divorce or indeed only when viewed within the perspective of time, and if so at what appropriate time or distance from the event? Further, can theoretical and clinical models for assessing normal and pathological response to family disruption, comparable to stages of mourning or object loss, be constructed and how can these be assessed except over time,

and if so over what time? It is because of these considerations—this desire to study evolution over time—that while making full use of clinical formulations at the initial study we have tried to reserve overall clinical judgments until we have had the fullest advantage of the maximum time perspective afforded by the follow-up inquiry. In consequence, as much as possible we suspended final judgment on the need for intervention at the time of the initial counseling and moved to intervene therapeutically at this time only where the suffering of the child seemed acutely to require it.

Third, we were interested in the age-specific normal developmental tasks of the children caught up in the divorce. In this part of the study being presented here our concern is with the adolescent subgroup and the impact of the divorce on the process of resolution of their phase-specific tasks. As developed by Anna Freud [11], Erikson [9], Blos [3], Laufer [17], and others, the appropriate mastery of these adolescent tasks is the necessary prologue to adulthood and true heterosexual identity formation. Blos has summarized this as follows: "The adolescent process proceeds from a progressive decathexis of primary love objects to increased narcissism and autoeroticism to heterosexual object finding and involves a detachment of psychic institutions from the parental influence . . . this process of detachment is accompanied by a profound sense of loss and isolation equivalent to mourning" [3, p. 125].

Our own formulation here, consistent with our study data and clinical observations, is that the family disruption by virtue of the particular interplay between the divorcing adults and the interplay between each of the parents and the adolescent poses a very specific hazard to this normal adolescent process of progressive decathecting of the primary love objects. As such it carries the potential for severely overburdening the adolescent ego in its maturational, time-appointed tasks. At the same time, the very same situation of hazard carries with it a concomitant potential for the stimulation of a developmental spurt and of accelerated growth toward adulthood which, *if it does not come prematurely* (i.e., before the normal detachment has begun to take place), may indeed even facilitate the road to independence and maturity.

Related to this formulation is our additional emphasis on the other side of the interaction—the psychological position of the parents—and the powerful reverberations in the adolescent of the

impact of the divorce on the parent. Thus the adolescents and their parents were conjoined within the vicissitudes of the parent-adolescent relationship as set within the divorce frame of reference. The young people were facing parents who were responding to the combination of stresses and promises in the current family disruption, sometimes with frenetic, regressive, even disorganized behaviors.³ At the same time their relationships to the parents were shaped by their personal versions of the complex phase-specific and usually conflicted interactions of the parent-child relationship and by the history and style of this relationship at earlier stages in the family life as well as its forerunners in the childhood and adolescent experiences of the parent himself.

Pushed by regressive forces, the parents often reverted to their own preadult or adolescent behavioral life-stages or patterns in identification with or in competition with their own children and or their own past.⁴ Many parents of both sexes driven by vulnerabilities, threatened by a loss of self-esteem with depressions, rages, and sexual impulses set free characteristically turned to their adolescent children for support, comfort, battle alliances, and moral vindication. Or sometimes the same parents manifest a desperate need to use the adolescent as an unconscious or conscious extension of themselves in the conflicted relationship with the spouse, creating difficulty in maintaining proper distance and separateness from developing youngsters despite intellectual recognition that the child's burgeoning autonomy needs protection. Thus Mrs. Y., a divorcing mother of four, protested that she was unable to forbid the 15- and 18-year-old-daughters from having continuing sexual relationships with their boyfriends, because "they had just lost their father." Both girls were engaged in considerable sexual activity when seen at counseling.

Some parents for a time preceding the divorce live out sexual impulses with much younger partners or move into a marketplace of available partners patterned after adolescent or young adult behavior. The adolescent child may then be experienced by the parent as a peer or competitor in these liaisons. For example, Mrs.

³ A recent study [4] points to a higher incidence of serious psychiatric illness among divorced people

⁴ A related set of observations by Elson [8] suggests that some parents embark on abrupt life changes including divorce in response to the adolescents' departure for college

B., age 33, who became depressed and anxious when she was without a date began to bring home a succession of young men in their twenties. She wore her skirts very short, her clothes very tight, her hair loose in the manner of a teenager. Her manner was flippant, bright, and hard. She complained to us that her 13-year-old daughter was chronically peevish and disobedient. "Probably" she said smilingly, "because she is jealous."

Sometimes hostile and destructive impulses were released at the time preceding and during the divorce in people who had been able to bind such impulses previously in obsessive-compulsive defenses and had functioned previously with apparent intactness in their responsible adult roles. Mr. C. at the time of the divorce explained to his adolescent son that his mother had developed a postpartum psychosis after her delivery requiring both hospitalization and electric shock, and that subsequently he needed to be cared for by somebody else during his infancy, emphasizing his scientific conviction that mental illness is inherited. His son, age 13, was clinically depressed and suicidal when seen by us. And still other parents tried to prevent independent relationships between their youngster and the separating parent. Mrs. L. appealed with repeated tears to her adolescent daughters for support against their sinful father. She endured their visits with the father with great tension, cross-examining them after each visit, making them voyeurs regarding the detail of the father's relationship with his girlfriend.

Shared Responses to the Divorce Experience

Certain experiences and responses to the divorce appeared in our data with sufficient frequency to be considered as common or characteristic of the adolescent group as a whole. The commonality of response undoubtedly has its roots in the developmental psychology of the adolescent and for the most part represents that aspect of the adolescent's functioning devoted to active mastery of, and adaptive coping with, the disorganizing impact of the divorce.

DIVORCE AS A PAINFUL EXPERIENCE

The 21 adolescents in our sample almost without exception experienced the divorce process as an extraordinarily painful event. Painful feelings were legion, and at times seemed too intense for the

young people to deal with. These feelings we suggest reflected the precipitousness with which psychological processes and changing perceptions that usually unfold developmentally over time often had to be telescoped into excessively brief time spans under pressure of the divorce happenings. Predominant affects generated were those of great anger at the parents for breaking up the family at a point critical to the adolescent, considerable sadness and sense of loss, and a sense of betrayal by the parents if not both. Intensely strong feelings of shame and embarrassment prevented some from sharing any of their misery, and several adolescents had not even told closest friends of their parents' divorce. The helpless immobilization implied in "I just *couldn't*" suggests that to talk of their pain and embarrassment would somehow reveal *them* as failures, rather than their parents. Other youth caught in loyalty conflicts experienced much guilt when in fantasy or reality they aligned themselves with one parent, with resentment at both parents the inevitable result. The extent of unhappiness in all forms was initially of considerable surprise to us all, since the general expectation of both the professional and lay communities was that the more vulnerable, dependent preschool and latency aged children would experience more overt distress. Despite the expectation that the adolescent process of decathecting the parents in the psychological move out of the house would lessen their pain, the acute distress repeatedly and forcefully conveyed to us was inescapably real.

Openly expressing resentment at her mother for bringing her to the counseling service, D. burst into angry tears. "God! This *would* have to happen just when things were settling down . . . (more tears) . . . this really *upsets* me! I could have used your help a long time ago, but I've *already* talked this out. (Did it help?) Yes! And now I want to forget about it!!" Alternately laughing at and apologizing for being so emotional at 15 years, she tearfully continued to demonstrate her inability to "forget about it," unleashing a torrent of anger, sadness, confusion, and helpless feelings.

A 14-year-old confided "the rug was pulled out from under me" when he learned his parents would divorce. Surprised and shocked, G. cried for some time, then undertook heroic efforts to effect a reconciliation. "I begged and begged . . . I tried to talk sense to my mother until I was almost *mute*," he even emphasized that a reconciliation would save lots of money. At counseling he sadly admitted his helplessness in this hopeless endeavor, but nevertheless asked the therapist to try once more for a reconciliation on his behalf.

Occasionally an adolescent insisted the divorce was not a particularly painful or disrupting experience, assuming a detached stance of "That's their problem . . . it doesn't really affect me." Only a year later were such adolescents able to reveal their pain. Thus a 17-year-old, asked at the follow-up session what advice he would give to parents contemplating divorce, quickly replied, "Don't divorce!!!" Because he had been cool and detached 1½ years earlier, the therapist replied that it sounded as if the divorce had been more painful than he had previously admitted. He emphatically agreed.

The pain of divorce for adolescents did not appear consequent to any feeling of responsibility for the parents' divorce. This is in contrast to the preschool and latency aged children studied, who assumed in their thinking varying degrees of responsibility for causing the divorce, which then increased their anguish and guilt. It is unclear why these adolescents did not feel this sense of responsibility. It may be that any assumption of responsibility would too gravely accentuate the revived oedipal pressures, in part phase-specific and in part heightened under the impact of the divorce. Additionally we can say of the pain of parental divorce at adolescence that it may remain a persistent and unresolved aspect of the psychic life of the individual, at least it was so from the reports of the parents in our group who had themselves sustained a parental divorce when they were adolescents (as distinct from those to whom this had occurred at earlier ages). This fresh and unrelenting psychic pain was often stated to be responsible for the sometimes lengthy delays in obtaining the current divorce.

ANXIETY ABOUT FUTURE MARRIAGE

Another significant finding was an enormous concern, shared by the more intact adolescents, about their future as marital partners. Whereas for some this was a painful problem expressed at the time of the initial counseling, for others it appeared to crystallize only during the year that followed. Because the breakdown of the parents' marriage comes at a time when the adolescent is expending considerable thought and psychological energy in the service of his heterosexual object-finding, the divorce experience interjects itself into his thinking in several relevant ways. It confronts the adolescent with the inescapable concern that divorce may also occur in *his* future adult life. For our adolescents, two different reactions occur

in response to this salient anxiety about future divorces. The first is a decision that he or she will *never* marry, heard commonly at the time of the initial counseling. Some who initially asserted their doubt about future marriage modified their position somewhat by the time of follow-up.

One attractive 15-year-old expressed firmly her doubt she would ever marry. L. would "travel a great deal and live with a man." "If we had a child then I suppose we would have to take some appropriate action . . . but I just don't know about getting married." A year later, L.'s stance was essentially unchanged, and in fact may have been consolidated by the newly discovered, disturbing information that her mother had been married twice before.

For those who had not ruled out marriage, much thought was given to marrying later than their parents had, with an attendant conscious intent to be quite selective, and wiser than their parents, in the choice of marital partners.

G., 16 by follow-up, said he "would be more careful than my parents were." "Actually, I'm not sure I'll ever marry . . . certainly not until I'm in my thirties." He expressed many questions about marriage—"it seemed to ruin so many lives." Further, D. emphatically stated, "I never would have children . . . unless I got to be a millionaire and needed an heir."

Early in the divorce process, one 16-year-old had already given considerable thought to her future marriage. "I won't marry young . . . I want to develop my interests and skills first. Love and respect are necessary . . . but companionship is the most important thing in a marriage. Each person has to have separate interests and respect the other person's interests, but it's really important to have common interests and goals, too. My parents didn't respect each other at all, and the only common interest they had was us kids."

Unfortunately, there is not much evidence that such conscious intent to select a mate more carefully actually eventuates in a more compatible marriage, although one would hope that such might be the case for these adolescents painfully thinking through their futures. In analyzing the 60 families in the sample we were repeatedly struck by the absence of love, compassion, and intimacy among the parents of these children, even in their descriptions of the earlier history of their marriages. These young people have hardly experienced and internalized any concept of marriage as characterized by giving, caring, and loving. Thus, although their caution is admirable, their experience with alternatives is sadly

limited, and it is hard to predict whether their caution will be in the service of better choices.

Related to the concern about being or finding an adequate marital partner was evidence in some of our adolescents of considerable anxiety about adequacy as a sexual partner, either in their current dating or future married life. Although this coincides with normative adolescent anxieties about developing sexuality, the identification with the parent as a sexual failure enhanced these anxieties. Some adolescents had been told in explicit detail of the sexual inadequacies or peculiarities of one parent by the other angry or self-justifying one. Two older adolescent girls dramatically accused their mothers of "making" them frigid because of the divorce action. Despite their ability to later relinquish this stance, the self-esteem of both girls as sexual beings in their own heterosexual relationships was threatened, demonstrating again how divorce can painfully collide with adolescent development.

WORRY ABOUT MONEY

One interesting observation was the often unrealistic concern about finances seen predominantly in those adolescents functioning reasonably well. Because money was one of the most common battlegrounds between divorcing parents, many of the children and adolescents became "money-wise" somewhat prematurely. For latency-age children anxiety about money was diffuse and related to overall feelings of deprivation, whereas for adolescents the anxiety about finances became focused around their future needs. Some adolescents were sure that neither parent would finance their college education, despite the obvious fact that sufficient funds were indeed available. Further, they were disinclined to settle the matter by definitively discussing the matter with the parents separately for fear of starting new arguments and bitterness. Other adolescents were told by their mothers that no money would be available at the same time that their fathers were insisting that college support was part of the final settlement given to the mother.

By the time of follow-up, even those adolescents most accustomed to affluence had adopted a more realistic stance toward the availability of money and tended to be less demanding in terms of personal luxuries. This did not necessarily mean they had forever given up the notion of personal affluence. Rather, there was

evidence of an increased capacity for delay of gratification, a more realistic understanding of financial priorities, and a certain gratefulness for getting what they could. In general, the divorce appeared to create a more mature attitude toward financial matters in the long range, despite the initial anxiety and anger about being deprived. Being more realistic generally seemed to be one of the benefits of divorce for those adolescents able to actively master the divorce experience in a reasonably healthy manner.

PRECIPITOUSLY CHANGED PERCEPTIONS OF THE PARENTS

Adolescent development involves the disengagement from the primary love objects and the accompanying move toward heterosexual object choice. Normally this process is a gradual one. One significant finding of our study was the fact that divorce shortens the normally available time span for the gradual accomplishment of these tasks, instead plunging the child abruptly into the process of having to disengage from and shift his perceptions of his parents. Because these teenagers had little opportunity to establish their own tempo in this regard, feelings of loss, emptiness, and loneliness were much exacerbated.

In our adolescent sample, for example, the divorce process forced a *precipitous* deidealization of the parent. The previously overvalued parent, considered unrealistically and with awe, becomes abruptly undervalued, a painfully fallen idol. Typically, the adolescent at this time feels personally betrayed by his parents' divorce, and often vigorously defends against such feelings of loss by expressing considerable rage. In the process, he overzealously undervalues and derogates at least one of these fallen parents. Because of the continuing tie with the parent, and those internalized aspects of the ego ideal derived from the parent, there is the risk that such precipitous deidealization may interfere with the consolidation of the adolescent's own consolidating self-esteem.

Angry at her mother for seeking a divorce, D. described her mother as "weak, artificial, inadequate, and *totally* dependent upon her therapist," while insisting that her father, previously very rejecting of her, was brilliant, good, "a fine person." Viewing both assessments as unrealistic, the therapist was concerned about this girl's future feminine identification and self-esteem if such unbalanced assessments were to persist. With gentle persistence the

16-year-old's rage collapsed to reveal a profound sadness related to both parents' weaknesses so dramatically revealed in the divorce conflict. "They *should* be more mature . . . I feel like I have to be the adult," she said wistfully.

For one 13-year-old the abrupt deidealization of her father did not occur until a year following the divorce when she accidentally encountered her rather proper father with a young woman at a local art fair. This coalesced with the recent discovery of other pertinent information about her father which had been withheld. Both events led to a sense of moral indignation, a tumbling of her father in her esteem, a new feeling that he was not a man of moral integrity. Her sense of disappointment, of loss, was as painful as her anger as she mourned the father of her childhood fantasy and her preadolescence.

ACCELERATED INDIVIDUATION OF PARENTS

Divorce also appears to force the adolescent to separate out each parent as an individual, to formulate differential views of his parents qua individuals earlier than would be developmentally required. One factor precipitating this earlier scrutiny and differentiation is the active process of working through the stated and unstated reasons for the divorce. The explanations provided by the parents initiate the process, providing powerful impetus to differentiating the parents into people with incompatible needs, interests, and goals. When a parent states that "we never really loved each other"; "she wants a different kind of life style"; "we just weren't interested in the same things"; or "he won't stop drinking . . . he needs more help than I can give him" the adolescent is forced to think beyond the parental unit to very distinct individuals. The individuation process is increasingly consolidated as each parent is seen functioning in geographical and psychological separation.

This process of differentiation may proceed in several directions, depending upon the capacity of the adolescent to integrate the observations about his parents and make constructive inferences that will influence his maturing personality. For those capable of such inferences, and whose parents permit this to occur by allowing the adolescent to make some of his own independent assessments, the result seems to be an earlier, more realistic acceptance of personality differences, a greater sense of closure about the divorce, and a

smoother process of their identity formation. For some this contributes to a more mature look at the hazards and potentialities of marital interactions. The abrupt individuation of the parents forced by the divorce may at the same time serve a defensive function by transforming feelings of helplessness into a sense of control via active mastery.

Poised and responsive, J., a 17-year-old, indicated at the following session she had taken a much more objective stance toward both parents. Previously furious at both, with attendant feelings of helplessness at her vulnerable position, J. viewed her relationship with each as considerably improved. Much to her relief, her father "doesn't get upset as much these days." "I guess I'm also seeing him more as a person than as my important daddy." Her mother's newly found happiness also pleases her, and she enjoys being close to her in a new and more mature way.

Just 15 at follow-up, S. indicated in a variety of ways that his relationship with his mother had deteriorated. "She does strange things . . . unreasonable things . . . like she has this plan to keep changing our rooms around, and when she's finished we won't be able to go back to our old rooms, even if we like them." "My mom told me she didn't hate my dad, but now I know she does. She does things just to punish him . . . like she waited until my dad drove all the way out to our house before telling him we couldn't go on the camping trip. Lots of times she gives reasons for things that aren't the real reasons." S. accurately perceived his mother's behavior as frequently irrational, yet seemed to have come to grips with it.

HEIGHTENED AWARENESS OF PARENTS AS SEXUAL OBJECTS

One further aspect of the abruptly changed perception of the parent attendant upon the divorce was seeing the parent as a sexual object. A certain number of adolescents became overtly anxious about their parents' sexuality, suddenly now visible where before it could be more readily denied. Having a mistress, frequent dates, or a boyfriend sleep overnight inescapably presented the adolescent with more evidence than he cared to see that his parent was indeed a sexual being and now very much in the same marketplace as the adolescent in terms of heterosexual object-finding. Undoubtedly the anxiety was due to increased sexual and reawakened incestuous fantasies: the parent was no longer a "safe" object. This was complicated by the fact that quite a few fathers had found girlfriends close in age to their adolescent daughters. Several adolescent girls

handled their anxiety and dismay by significantly but quietly curtailing the number of visits with their father. Others were scornful or morally indignant, primarily as a defense against their own incestuous fantasies, yet did not share these feelings with the parent.

LOYALTY CONFLICTS: THE NEED TO CHOOSE

In many of the divorcing families in our sample, one or both parents consciously or unconsciously required that the child align with him in the continuing struggle. This demand on the adolescent frequently resulted in feelings of despair, anger, guilt, and depression. At the time of the initial counseling, early in the divorce proceedings, more than half of our adolescents were profoundly conflicted by issues of allegiance and loyalty, and angrily protested the role they felt was being forced upon them.

After some initial resistance to becoming involved in divorce counseling, W. settled back and said, "Okay, mother and I hassle." When asked what about, she replied, "my mother tries to get me to say critical things about my dad and I don't want to!" When the therapist supported her stance, the 14-year-old warmed up and continued, "mother demands that I take her side . . . she expects that I will share her anger toward dad for leaving her for another woman . . . and if I just stay silent, then it means that I agree with her!" W. described how she actively fought back against her mother. Later in the session, when the therapist shared her feelings that it was unfair for anyone to be caught between parents, W. cried, "But I *am* in the middle . . . I *am* in the middle . . . it *is* my struggle! I'm loyal to my father and I love my mother. I want to help my mother and I know that she needs it . . . but she keeps going about it in the wrong way!!

It is significant that by the follow-up a year later, virtually all of these adolescents had been able to disengage themselves from such active loyalty conflicts. This is in striking contrast to the latency age children seen in this study, many of whom were unable to detach themselves from this destructive process by virtue of their age and dependence on the parent for continued support and nurturance. The normal adolescent process of decathecting the parental figures combined with the early abrupt differentiation of parents as separate individuals functioned as an invaluable assist to the adolescent caught in divorce. Instead of feeling forced to align oneself with one parent and reject the other, the adolescent was able

to detach himself from both parents, including the parent making the demand for the allegiance.

At follow-up a year later, W.'s anger at her mother remained, but she could now openly discuss her feelings and was very much in control of herself. She said that "things are just the same . . . my mother is just as angry, just as bitter, and just as jealous of my father's girlfriend." The intensity was the same, but the expression of the mother's feelings was perhaps a bit muted now. What had changed was that they, the children, had learned to talk less of their father, and when the mother asked if the girlfriend was present during their visits, they lied to the mother now, and solved the problem that way.

This adolescent had learned to deal adaptively with her difficult mother. She no longer felt pulled by either parent, and in fact gained self-esteem in the move away from both of them. What was necessary however, was a compromise of the high moral sense of the adolescent, that is, the need to lie to keep the peace. Whereas a year earlier such a need to compromise created moral outrage and angry outbursts against the mother, this was now accepted as a necessary adaptive solution. In those adolescents, not few in number, who were forced to compromise their integrity in such ways, there was no evidence that their moral sense was compromised in other areas.

Related to this was the observation that our adolescents were forced to grapple openly with issues of morality raised uniquely by the divorce. Less universal in scope than the traditional moral searching of adolescence, these concerns centered around which parent was right or wrong in those attitudes and actions causing the marital conflict and eventuating in divorce. Most adolescents struggled with such moral questions not only in the service of making judgments about the parents, but more importantly in the service of consolidating their own conscience and moral development, particularly in determining appropriate ethical and sexual conduct for themselves now and for the future. For some it was a question of which parent represented the appropriate moral attitude to be identified with, while others determined that both parents' moral and ethical behavior was found wanting.

E. talked at counseling of changes over the past few years in her life, stating, "even though my mother and father were dishonest, and I used to be, I've suddenly stopped. I don't know why . . . I just decided I didn't want to be like them." A year later at follow-up, E. indicated she'd thought a lot about her parents "cheating on each other" (sexual affairs) . . . "I think it's terrible!"

This is especially significant for this adolescence because, lacking adults of high moral conduct available as role models, her move toward higher ethical standards came from within as she increased the distance between herself and her parents after the divorce.

STRATEGIC WITHDRAWAL

All of the adolescents in this study tried with varying degrees of success to make use of distancing and withdrawal as a defense against experiencing the pain of the family disruption. Sometimes this distancing took the active form of much accelerated social activity or staying away from home, which was especially threatening to some parents, particularly those parents who had been apprehensive initially about acting out of their adolescent children, and whose apprehensiveness may have increased by virtue of their own newfound sexual freedom. Some youngsters declared vehemently their lack of involvement with parental problems despite behavior and many tears to the contrary.

A certain percentage of adolescents in our study held steadfastly to detachment and distance verging on aloofness. Some of these were indeed young people for whom the divorce essentially legalized and consolidated a family life style and relationship pattern between the parents which had preexisted for many years. These young people had already set a particular course.

Thus P., age 16½, an essentially intact youngster, who continued to do well at school and elsewhere, said of his father (whose combined job and mistress had previously kept him absent from the home), "Dad was never around before. We learned to get along without him. The divorce won't make any real difference." P. volunteered that he had felt sad at times, because he never had a real father; he missed this when he was a "growing child." He hoped that the divorce would bring some relief for his mother's anger and chronic unhappiness.

P.'s older brother, who was into serious, rebellious acting out, drunkenness, drug abuse, car accidents, and violent outbursts in the family said the divorce would change nothing for him. His social behavior and relationship patterns within the family continued essentially on the same hurricane course, perhaps somewhat accelerated. At age 18, within a year of the divorce, he became involved in a drunken accident during which he demolished a friend's car.

The group that particularly interested us were young people in their early or mid-adolescence who before the divorce had not led lives essentially detached from their families. Rather it seemed to

be primarily in response to the divorce decision that their behavior veered away from the parental figures. Their "cool" manner was in fact a source of some initial concern to us as to whether the central developmental impact of the divorce might indeed be an increase in narcissistic investment and a diminution in empathic response. Thus R., a very bright 15-year-old, stoutly maintained that his parents divorced only because they had undertaken to build a new home and could not agree on the number or placement of the bathrooms. He held to this position concretely and not metaphorically throughout the entire counseling sessions. I., when initially seen, delivered herself of some very strong opinions with surprisingly mild affect. Her dispassionate recounting of her parents' marital failures and their personal faults and her clear interest only in her own life was striking and troublesome in this 13-year-old girl.

It is therefore of central importance to report that these particular adolescents looked the best to us in our entire sample at follow-up not only in terms of their having matured considerably during the intervening year but primarily in terms of their now demonstrated capacity for empathy, warmth, and compassion toward at least one parent. Moreover, this sometimes took a form well beyond verbal support and extended to considerable help in the home. Thus L., in contrast to her previous cool stance and self-centered behavior, had willingly assumed responsibility for helping her mother with the younger siblings and expressed genuine concern about her mother's welfare.

When seen at follow-up, R. no longer maintained his previous superficial explanation of his parents' divorce. He seemed much more outgoing and poised and considerably less preoccupied with his own needs. This time he said that he thinks his parents behaved foolishly, that he feels his mother's needs for support, help, and intimacy, but that he feels that he can be of no help to her, and it would not benefit him or them for him to enter into the difficulty between his mother and his father. He was willing at this follow-up to admit how painful the divorce had been in the past year.

A., who had been spending most of her time out of the house at the initial counseling, also seemed to have mellowed considerably. She was less defensive and less angry. Whereas previously she said, "I don't care about him or her" in relation to her parents, A. now said that her dad had problems, but she was not going to let his problems upset her and "bother my activities and my life." When reminded of her statements the year before, and her fighting with her

blings and feelings of injustice on the part of her parents, A. laughed freely, and said, "Was I like that? Wow, I really was a brat then."

It would appear that for those adolescents the emotional detachment at the time of the parental divorce represents a strategic withdrawal in the service of maintaining the integrity of adolescent development. It seems clear that the distancing at the time of the height of the struggle saves the adolescent from anguish, humiliation, and emotional depletion, and enables him at a later date—at a time appropriate to his own timetable and needs, and when the external turmoil has subsided somewhat—to be supportive, empathic, and sensitive. Nor is there any reason to assume that such capacities for empathy, compassion, and protectiveness will not endure into adulthood. These findings would be very much in accord with our understanding of the significant place of withdrawal and denial in the normal development of children and adolescents.

Major Psychopathological Formations

Finally we must consider these subgroups among our youngsters in whom the divorce triggered or consolidated serious psychopathological response as assessed within the time perspective of initial counselling and subsequent follow-up. We consider these the young people *at risk* and needful of psychotherapeutic intervention. One case illustrative of each such subgroup is presented here.

PROLONGED INTERFERENCE WITH ENTRY INTO ADOLESCENCE

For several young people in our study the primary impact of the parental divorce experience can be considered as a developmental interference in which the entry into adolescence and the mastery of the normative tasks of adolescence seemed delayed or held back indefinitely by the particular conflict configuration and parent-child interaction which obtained at that time.

T. is an early adolescent whose aggressive, driving father was often caustic and verbally abusive with his wife and three children. At other times the father was passionately and demonstrably affectionate with his son, but rarely with any other members of the family. T.'s mother suffered with a severe

hysterical illness with disabling psychosomatic symptoms of many years standing for which she had recently entered psychotherapy. She was chronically depressed, and had made several suicide attempts, which were known to the children. T.'s mother was close to her three children and attempted consciously within the limits of her own low self-esteem to shield them from the husband's depreciation. To compensate for her husband's disinterest, she had always been especially close to T., and he in turn worried about her illness, her depression, and her suicide attempts.

When T. was told by his parents of their divorce decision, he ran from the livingroom screaming, "You're trying to kill us all." Following his father's moving out of the household, T. began increasingly to assume a protective role with his mother. He checked her social activities, monitored her telephone calls, requested the check at restaurants, sat in his father's place at the dinner table, and lay down on the sofa with her on occasion. Some of the impetus for this behavior doubtless derived from the mother's gratification with T.'s attention, which was supportive of her at a time when she felt intensely deprived, rejected not only by her husband but also by the maternal grandparents, who strongly opposed the divorce.

When seen a year thereafter the boy's preoccupation with his mother's health had intensified. His jealousy of her other relationships and particularly of her intimacy with her psychotherapist was undiminished. He flew into jealous rages when she dated, was indeed sleepless when she went out on a date, and worried about her continually, especially about her possible death from cancer. His own attachment to his friends had lessened, as he had become more preoccupied with his mother, although he continued to do well academically.

T., at 14, is clinically at risk, manifesting a delayed entry into adolescence and is in active need of psychotherapeutic intervention. A year following the divorce he is still suffering with increasingly intolerable conflict which binds him into a conflicted, overly eroticized oedipal attachment to his mother, an attachment which has been given real and fantasy impetus by the father's departure and the mother's divorce-intensified needs. T.'s panic at the announcement of the divorce decision by the parents presaged the difficulties which he did indeed encounter. A year following the parental separation he is further away from his own autonomy and independence.

TEMPORARY INTERFERENCE WITH ENTRY INTO ADOLESCENCE

H., age 13, an adopted child of a marriage which came to divorce after 1½ years of no conversation, no sex, and no meals between the parents, who communicated entirely by written notes during all of this time, had an intense relationship with her father, who had held her on his lap until she was 11 years

old. He was a violent, abusive, and authoritarian figure to his wife and two sons, but never to his daughter. The mother was a petulant, long-suffering woman who seemed helpless for many years to resist the father's tantrums, moodiness, and beatings. After the mother filed for divorce, the father refused to leave the house and returned nightly in a towering rage. When the divorce was granted he disappeared, leaving no forwarding address, although he continued to send child support money from a post office box.

When H. was seen, she was apprehensive, depressed, and inarticulate. Her sadness, her sense of loss, her worry about her father, her forlorn hope that he still loved her despite his desertion and her tattered self-esteem came out gradually, but without relief or diminution of her depression. H. gained 20 pounds in the three months following the mother's decision to file for divorce. During this period she began to drop contact with her friends, to engage in doll play with younger children, and to sleep in her mother's bed.

At follow-up, approximately two years later, H. was in the process of reconstituting her predivorce state of functioning. She was gradually regaining an appropriate age level performance at school, although still having difficulty. She had, however, resumed friends in her age group and was succeeding in losing much of her excess weight gain. Although still somewhat subdued and stolid in her responses, she seemed to have moved into age-appropriate adolescent development. Her recovery from the regression and resumption of age-appropriate behavior coincided with the mother's remarriage and H.'s good relationship with the stepfather.

This case represents a delay rather than a full blocking of the youngster's entry into adolescent development. We note in passing that sleeping with her mother following the divorce is not a common occurrence among adolescents, but was more common following parental divorce where there are latency or younger children in the family. There are many such instances in our sample in which the parent is apprehensive about sleeping alone at this time. In this case it is important to point out that B. was not able to resume her own developmental agenda until she was set free from the regressive interaction with the mother and the multifaceted impact of the father's desertion by the mother's remarriage and her good relationship with her stepfather.

PSEUDO-ADOLESCENCE IN RESPONSE TO PARENTAL DIVORCE

One danger specific to adolescence is entry into heterosexual activity, prematurely, before having acquired the preconditions for true heterosexual love relationships. To the extent that the sexual

activity occurs under the dominance of an incestuous tie to the parents or as an extension of the parents' unconscious or conscious needs and impulses the adolescent can be said to be living out a pseudo-adolescence rather than a true emancipating adolescent experience.

C., age 15 at counseling, began her sexual activity at age 14 at the time that her father began a sexual affair with a neighbor. C. was full of rage at her father, whom she considered an adulterer, and freely admitted throwing rocks at the windows of his mistress and similar harassments. She described in obscene language her fantasies of her father's sexual performance with his mistress and shared these and other confidences regarding her father's sexual activity with her mother in what appeared to be an ongoing relationship in which mother and daughter developed strategies together regarding the father and his mistress. These consultations seemed at times to reach bizarre limits, as for instance when the mother found an unsigned note addressed to no one in particular, saying, "I want to love you," and called a family conference to ascertain what strategies should be undertaken.

C.'s father, a mild-mannered, gentle, chronically depressed professional man, referred to his marriage as a "blur," made increasing use of pot, which seemed to be affecting his judgment especially at work, and seemed unable to see any connection between his behavior and consequences either for his wife or for his children. C.'s mother, a teacher who had been relatively organized in her functioning prior to the divorce, suffered a severe regression at the time of the divorce decision. She began to show increasingly poor judgment and seemed to be warding off a disorganizing depression through a variety of disjunctive behaviors including inviting numbers of young men to live in the household, probably in a desperate effort to deny her intolerable perception of the husband's departure and absence. In various ways it seemed clear that the mother in her regressed state seemed unable except in a verbal way to differentiate her needs from those of her daughter.

C. continued on a course of sexual activity with a succession of young men in the year following the divorce. At school her performance was poor. She seemed unmotivated, educationally and vocationally, and primarily interested in the male teachers. At follow-up both mother and daughter seemed essentially unchanged. The family had gone from crisis to crisis, and the house had become almost a boarding home in which a variety of young men lived, some of whom were sleeping with the daughter.

C. is a severely disturbed adolescent whose symptoms included drinking, drug abuse, promiscuity, and poor impulse control. She is much at risk, and in urgent need of both psychotherapy and environmental controls.

REGRESSION FOLLOWING LOSS OF EXTERNAL VALUES AND CONTROLS

Another subgroup of young people at risk were those for whom the parental divorce signified primarily the loss of external behavioral constraints and models which still provided a necessary part of their psychic economy. Specifically the external presence of the parent, usually the father, served to reinforce and organize still insufficiently consolidated inner-control mechanisms. Therefore for these youngsters the disruption of the family structure, the loss of the father's physical presence, the discovery of sexual, aggressive, and "amoral" behaviors in parents with the consequent sense of disappointment and betrayal triggered acute anxiety and intense conflict. It seemed clear that the controls and tenuous identification and ego ideals of these young people were unable to contain heightened sexual and aggressive impulses in the absence of the familiar external reinforcement and threats.

B., a junior college student, discovered accidentally that his father was having a sexual liaison with a young woman before this information became known to his mother and before the divorce decision. This discovery caused B. intense and unrelenting anguish. "I began to feel a lot of anxiety. What should I do; what shouldn't I do? Should I do it now, should I do it later?" With the father's decision to request the divorce B. was enormously shocked and felt that his father had betrayed his major philosophy of life, namely, never to quit. "It was rare that you could go to my dad with any kind of a problem and not have him say, 'You have to stay with it.'" In this case my dad was chucking away what was the basis of my philosophy that he had taught me. It meant to me that maybe my point of view was wrong since my dad threw it away. It felt like I was taking a creaky ship into the storm" (referring to his own future ventures into adulthood and particularly to his plans to become engaged to a young woman).

B. developed a series of somatic symptoms, including dizzy spells, sleeplessness, and fears of being alone. These culminated in an emergency episode when while driving a car across a bridge B. felt unable to proceed. He became acutely fearful that he was going to die, began to sob uncontrollably, and pulled his legs up into a fetal position. He was taken to a hospital by the police. Shortly thereafter B. was admitted to a psychiatric hospital where he remained for 10 days as an inpatient, and eventually, successfully began to work out the conflicts triggered by the divorce and in particular his feelings that he was "incapacitated by my father's desertion."

B.'s father, an aggressive and somewhat blustering businessman, had indeed

ventured into what appeared to be an adolescent fling at middle-age. B.'s mother was a dependent, somewhat unrealistic woman who lived in B.'s view "in that upper-middle class world that exists for women who drive station wagons and work hard on charities." Central in B.'s breakdown was his statement "I think that the beliefs which gave me the ability to deal effectively with life were blown apart for me."

DIVORCE AS A SUPERIMPOSED TRAUMA

Finally there were in our study youngsters at serious risk whose life experience had been unhappy and fraught with conflict and insecurities for many years. For these adolescents the divorce itself represented one more link in a long chain of experiences out of which they drew the same lesson: the reasonable needs and wishes of the children had little or no priority within the family. These adolescents find themselves without role models, prodded by the wish to achieve independence from the unhappiness and rejection they have known, but without the inner integrations needed to face the complex and exacting demands of adolescence. In a true sense they are in flight *from* rather than *to*, and there was no doubt that without intense psychological help over the long term they would not be able to make headway toward adulthood. In addition, the parents of these youngsters burdened themselves and their children with their own unresolved or unmodified need for immediate gratifications, with frantic efforts to ward off psychotic disorganization and profound depressions which threatened to engulf them, and in direct competition with, and depreciation of, the capacities and physical appearance of their children.

E., age 13, came from a family in which both her father and mother had struggled throughout the marriage to maintain adulthood, but had little sense of the dimensions of the parental roles except as economic providers. Each had had throughout a succession of open love affairs often with the other's friends. The father, a handsome, narcissistic man with an explosive temper, had precipitated the divorce, because he wished to marry an older woman "who would be good for me." The mother, a tense, pretty, young woman, had warded off a profound chronic depression by a variety of maneuvers including staying out of the home, and needing the constant company of a man. At the time of the divorce decision both parents were preoccupied with their own needs: the father with his wish to move out as easily as possible; the mother with the acquisition of a new man to cover her loneliness, rage, and threatened depression.

At counseling, E. explained that she had no use for any adults, particularly her parents, that she wished only to live alone, because she finds adults deceitful, selfish, irresponsible, and without morality. The parents' divorce confirmed and underscored this view. Her affective life centered around an encapsulated fantasy of horses who led an erotic, wild, and beautiful life, mating endlessly and producing in polygamous society happy children whom they treat with love and compassion. E. said, "Whenever things get tough I go into my room, and I talk to my horses, and my horses talk back to me." E. had few friends and was doing poorly at school.

At follow-up E. said there was one adult in the world that she trusted. That was the matron in the local school who permitted her to smoke. E. was smoking excessively with some mild drug use, a great deal of loneliness, and a desperate yearning for affection, friends, and interest from any quarter where it might be forthcoming. She had established herself in those high school groups identified with antisocial behavior. Although she had mostly relinquished her preadolescent fantasy of horses, she had hardly replaced it and was feeling empty, restless, and hungry for stimuli.

E. is suffering with a serious depression of long standing, is predelinquent, with a lifelong history of emotional deprivation and erratic parenting. She is very much in need of long-term psychotherapeutic help and environmental supports.

Conclusions

It appears that following parental divorce many young people live through an acutely painful experience which, although time limited for most, is marked by a rapid acceleration and telescoping of normative adolescent perceptions, conflicts, preoccupations, and responses. Some of the distress may indeed be related to the rapidity with which the changes occur under the press of the divorce impact and the diminished ability of the adolescent to exercise control over the tempo of change. Nevertheless, most of the young people whom we studied were able within a year following parental separation to take up their individual agendas and proceed toward adulthood at a more measured pace. Moreover, it seemed that except where the response to divorce caused delays or ruptured development, they were able to continue at a level equivalent to their previous achievement or enhanced even by their mastery of the inner and outer events of the preceding year.

Those youngsters who entered adolescence and encountered the

parental divorce with a history of long-standing difficulties seemed to follow a more troubled course. These difficulties in many instances were intensely exacerbated by the difficulties of the parents at the time of the divorce. Of particular relevance to the experience of the adolescent was the degree of the parental regression, particularly to preadult or adolescent modes of behavior, and the tendency of some parents to cross generational boundaries out of the intensity of their own needs and conflicts. Many youngsters caught up in this interacting web were severely limited in their capacity to address complex adolescent tasks.

Finally, it seemed that the adolescents who appeared to do best were frequently those who were able at the outset to establish and maintain some distance from the parental crisis and whose parents, whether willingly or reluctantly, permitted them to do so. As noted, these young people at first impressed us as seeming somewhat self-centered and perhaps insensitive. We discovered over time that these were the youngsters who were able at the end of the year to develop that remarkable combination of realistic assessment of their parents along with compassion, which augurs well for their future.

Repeatedly, throughout this study, our attention was drawn to the central importance of the particular patterning of the parent-child relationship obtaining both at the time of the divorce and previously and to the particular unconscious and conscious dissonances and congruities which are present in the interacting needs, impulses, conflicts, and defensive configurations. All of these seem centrally related to the capacities of each family member to hold to the separation of generations and to his individual growth potential.

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